Learning Review: The many faces of feedback

Brief description	Case Study, in which the participants analyse communication processes on the basis of the transactional model of communication.
Goals	• Analyse communication processes based on the transactional model of communication • Reflect different types of feedback • Develop creative solutions to improve the co-creation of meaning
Time	Ca. 45 minutes
Method	• Culture-unspecific • Distributive/instructive
Material	• Case Study
Implementation	• n/a
Notes	n/a
Source	Adelheid Iken Developed as part of the EduBox project: EduBox – Intercultural Communication – Online Modules (Version 2.0. Hamburg Open Online University HOOU). Glocal Campus Jena, https://glocal-campus.org.

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Task

The many faces of feedback

Please read the following case study:

The following is an extract from an internship report. The student, let us call her Felice, did her internship in a company that recruits young people who are searching for a trainee position. The company searches for appropriate candidates by placing ads, pre-selecting and interviewing them and then presenting the results to their respective clients. One of the tasks Felice had to carry out, was to interview potential candidates and pass on the results to the branch managers.

And this is what Felice wrote:

There were issues at work which were a real challenge and I want to recall one of them.
One day while I was working, I received an email from one of our branch managers, Tabea. She forwarded an email that she herself had received directly from one of the applicants I had interviewed and had recommended to her. She forwarded the email to me without any comments – just with a question mark. Generally, when me and my colleagues interview someone and recommend a person for a trainee position, we expect the branch managers to give us feedback within five to seven days in order to be able to give the applicant an answer as soon as possible. But some of the branch managers are not acting responsibly enough and don't keep up with our processes.

But let me give you a bit of background information. I had interviewed the person, put together all the information, including my recommendation, and had sent this to Tabea. I had been waiting for Tabea's feedback for more than a week, which was why I sent her two reminders, neither of which she responded to. Meanwhile the candidate, who was a young girl looking for a trainee-job, emailed me many times asking for feedback as to whether she would get the position, because she was under a lot of time pressure. And every time I had to tell her that I was still waiting for Tabea's answer and would call her as soon as I heard anything.

Then, finally, after one month I received an email from Tabea telling me that she had found someone else herself and that I can take down the vacancy. However, she failed to give me any feedback about the candidate I had recommended to her, making it difficult for me to communicate to the candidate as to why she had been rejected. I was so taken aback, and actually furious, because now it was me having to break the bad news and this after many weeks of anxious waiting.

Then, after a couple of days, Tabea forwarded me the email she had received directly from the applicant, with only a question mark. The young girl basically complained to her about not having received any feedback for such a long time. In addition, she also complained about me, explaining how she had called the branch office many times to get an answer and to speed up the decision process, and how she was told again and again that she had to wait until we called her.

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Instead of taking responsibility for her actions and apologizing to the candidate for such late feedback, Tabea forwarded the email to me only with this question mark. How was I supposed to interpret this question mark? Why should it be me that was taking responsibility? But then, I sat down and apologized to the candidate in a very formal way, to which she replied very informally and angrily. I could understand her anger, but I had to be very careful with my answer. I was conscious not to sound unprofessional and to tell her that it was someone else's fault, thereby giving the company a bad image in her eyes. So, I had to become even more formal and distanced with my answer, shutting down the possibility of her replying yet again. I was glad that this was the last communication with her.

This incident made me very angry and sad at the same time, because I had to take responsibility for someone else's actions even though I was always trying my best to do my job in the right way. As an intern I was not in the position to tell a branch manager how to do her job, which was the reason I was feeling bad about it, as I knew that I had to work with Tabea until the end of my internship.

At that time, I was very worried that this topic would continue to get bigger and involve more people in the company, which is why I was very careful when writing the email. I was trying to hide my anger and sadness; at the same time, I was trying to be professional and think about the manager's and company's image and to stay polite and formal. I should also mention that at that time I was mentally in a bad state and was not feeling strong enough to deal with these kinds of problems. I was also trying, in addition to my own tasks and responsibilities, to cover for a colleague while he was in vacation.
Nevertheless, I think I managed the problem well and did not let it escalate further.

Use the transactional model of communication to analyse the case study. Pay particular attention to the following questions:

- Who are the communicators or people involved?
- What forms of communication are being used?
- The email sent to Felice with the question mark is central to this case study. Analyse the way it has been decoded and encoded.
- Which medium has been used?
- What type of noise is interfering?
- What is the overall context of the communication?
- How do you view the response or feedback by Felice?
- Do you see the possibility for a co-construction of meaning that Felice has failed to exploit?
- How do you evaluate the outcome of the communication?
- Please offer two optional ideas as to what Felice could have done differently, and to what effect (e.g., job satisfaction, work atmosphere, working procedures) and argue why.

Source: Adelheid Iken

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