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Feedback and Threat States: A Case Study of the Formal Feedback Process in the PCC

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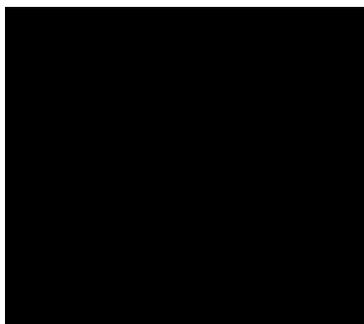


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Executive Summary

Feedback is an integral part of learning and improving performance and encompasses both positive and negative uses. In the [REDACTED] (PCC), representatives (reps) have access to extremely sensitive [REDACTED] (employee) information, and if an error occurs, the fallout can be massive. Feedback, both positive and negative, is an integral part of the success of the PCC and is delivered to reps via multiple avenues. The majority of negative feedback, however, is delivered via the [REDACTED] Feedback Form, and considering that errors in the PCC could negatively impact a [REDACTED] sensitive information, delivering feedback via this method could impact the effectiveness of the feedback if this particular process is causing a threat state in reps.

Threat states are negative emotional responses to feedback that cause demotivation in reps, and these threat states can inhibit learning and motivation to improve. In this recommendation report, I analyzed data obtained from surveying PCC reps and determined that a threat state does exist within the feedback process as it pertains to the use of the [REDACTED] Feedback Form.

PCC reps identified the threat state exists based on the following aspects of the process:

- Delivery method: though convenient for [REDACTED] in other departments to use, delivering the form via email feels impersonal to reps, and is sent to such a large audience that it brings too much visibility to the error. PCC reps would prefer the form be emailed to their supervisor who then discusses the feedback with the rep during their monthly 1:1.
- Frequency of feedback: reps noted that if feedback is sent to them too often, for instance multiple times per week, they begin to feel defeated and picked on. Reps would prefer all feedback is sent to and disseminated by their supervisor.

Additionally, I reviewed and discussed the [REDACTED] Feedback Form. I highlighted issues with the form in its current state, and recommended the following changes:

- While the form provides a standard template for providing feedback and makes it easy to follow, reps felt the form is missing a section to explain how the error in their work was located. Additionally, in my own analysis of the form, I noted the form is extremely outdated in terms of verbiage and needs multiple updates to bring the form current.

In summation, the current practice for providing feedback to PCC reps via the [REDACTED] form potentially causes a threat state within reps and showcases multiple opportunities for improvement to help reduce and/or alleviate this threat state. Threat states have the power to inhibit learning and stunt motivation to improve, and as the data shows that a threat state exists due to specific aspects of the process of using the [REDACTED] Feedback Form to deliver negative feedback, the recommendations in this report should be implemented to help ensure the overall success of the PCC.

Feedback and Threat States: A Case Study of the Formal Feedback Process in the PCC

Introduction

Since joining the [REDACTED] over three years ago, I have been involved in the formal feedback process as both a recipient and a provider of feedback. As a PCC representative (rep), including my time as a senior rep, there were times that receiving feedback would cause negative emotions to arise and become associated with that feedback; these emotions began to rule my thoughts any time an email with “feedback” in the title arrived in my inbox. Approximately two years ago, PCC leadership began to encourage PCC reps, and the specialist teams the PCC supports, to use the term “coaching” instead of “feedback” to help lessen negative connotations associated with what became known as “the f-word.” But for myself, those negative emotions I associated with feedback never dissipated, and I wondered if other reps felt the same way.

A year ago, when I joined the PCC leadership team, I was put in a position of providing feedback more frequently and in more ways. Instead of only using the formal feedback process, I was now responsible for evaluating calls for reps and providing feedback notes in their evaluations; I was also included in rep’s monthly Quality Assurance (QA) meetings and would often provide feedback in-the-moment during those meetings. As this work became more frequent for me, I began to notice varying responses from reps when given feedback, ranging from physical reactions (facial expressions, body language, demeanor, etc.) to emotional reactions (upset, stress, happy, anger, etc.). A few months into my time on the leadership team, I decided I wanted to learn more about the formal feedback process and how it affects PCC reps; I was curious if the current process was actually helping reps improve performance or causing them to disengage with the learning and their work.

I decided as my applied project for my master’s program, I would research the feedback process and provide a recommendation report based on my findings. The focus of my research was a case study of the existing formal feedback process to determine if the current process for providing formal feedback to PCC reps was causing a threat state, and, if so, what specific aspects of the process were causing that threat state. After analyzing the data from my research, I conclude that the current formal feedback process being used in the PCC does cause a threat state within reps.

Feedback in the PCC

PCC Reps are gatekeepers of sensitive [REDACTED] (employee) information. At any given time, a PCC rep can view personal details such as home address, phone number, birthday, banking information, even the last four digits of their Social Security Number. If a rep is not paying close attention, they could fall prey to errors such as changing the wrong [REDACTED] address, phone number, banking information, or name (to name a few), providing sensitive information to the wrong individual to improper caller verification, or provide incorrect direction to resolve an error based on the information they have access to. For these reasons, and others, feedback is a critical piece of attending to errors,

helping reps learn how to improve so the error does not happen again, and the overall success of the PCC. Once I joined the leadership team, my visibility to errors with sensitive [REDACTED] information increased as my scope of work expanded beyond my own calls as a rep to those of all PCC reps. This increased visibility opened my eyes to the frequency of errors such as these occurring, and I was concerned that the feedback process in place was not effective enough to help reps improve based on my own experience of seeing how rep's reacted when given feedback.

The feedback process in the PCC involves multiple avenues for reps to receive feedback. PCC reps can receive feedback from their peers, their supervisor, or [REDACTED] in other specialist groups, and this feedback can be delivered by Instant Message (IM), verbally, in an informal email, or written on the formal feedback form. To narrow the scope of my research, I opted to only investigate the avenue of feedback provided on the formal feedback form. This form, called the [REDACTED] Feedback Form (see Appendix A), is used mainly by [REDACTED] in other specialist groups when they provide feedback to PCC reps, but it is also occasionally used by a PCC rep's supervisor.

[REDACTED] Feedback Form

The [REDACTED] form is a simple fill-in-the-blank chart preceded by a set of straightforward directions for completing and sending the form. Only two colors, grey and white, are used on the form; one color denotes the heading and the other the space for information, and there are borders that help clearly define these areas as well. The color scheme of the form provides a utilitarian aesthetic, but this is a positive aspect as multiple colors or unclear boundaries could make the information harder to consume. The language is very straightforward and clearly identifies what information is asked for; the verbiage used is focused on feedback and resources. The language used evinces themes of learning and understanding, which should be the focus of feedback. That being said, some of the verbiage is outdated; for instance, the form calls out "PRIMUS solution" which is no longer the system used for the knowledgebase. In addition, the color scheme and overall straightforwardness of the form could be interpreted as cold or impersonal.

Literature on Feedback and Threat States

As I began my research for this report, I reviewed current literature on the topics of both feedback and threat states. My goal for reviewing literature about feedback was to determine the purpose of feedback and when/how it is most effective. The goal for reviewing literature about threat states was to determine what constitutes a threat state and ways to help identify when a threat state exists.

Feedback

Rausch, Seifried, & Harteis (2017) noted that when people work, they work toward a goal regardless of the type of work they do, and this is called goal-oriented behavior. Rausch et al. (2017) explained further that errors in work are avoidable, non-achievement of a workplace goal. These errors, when brought to the attention of the individual who erred (i.e., by being provided with feedback) provide opportunities to improve performance and build strong work habits. Shute (2008) agreed, and noted that feedback, when effective, is a significant factor in motivating and empowering learning

and crucial to improvement. Furthermore, as learning and improvement in behavior are tied to the expectations set up in the workplace, as feedback is provided, it is expected that behavior will improve (Winiński, 2009). In short, these sources helped determine that feedback would be defined as a result of an error in one's work and is effective when it empowers and motivates PCC reps to learn and improve.

Threat State

Often, when an individual receives feedback, some aspect of the feedback itself can cause a negative emotional response within the individual. Rausch et al. (2017) noted feedback is the result of an error occurring when attempting to reach a goal, and that the acknowledgement that an error has occurred can be an emotional event. These emotional responses, especially in the workplace, tend to be negative as the individual experiences shame, guilt, or anger at the error being acknowledged, and could even fear "losing face" at work (Rausch et al., 2017). These negative emotions can also serve as a signal that learning is impaired and motivation decreased (Rausch et al., 2017; Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015; Shute, 2008). Based on these sources, I defined a threat state as a negative emotional response to feedback that causes demotivation in reps.

Methods

To appropriately examine the aspects of the formal feedback process in the PCC and if the process creates a threat state, I combined research methods to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data.

Formal Online Survey

I developed and administered a comprehensive survey to PCC reps using Qualtrics. The survey (see Appendix B) was written in such a manner that I was able to gather quantitative data (number of reps who received feedback, number of reps who feel angry, scared, defensive, etc. when receiving feedback, etc.) and qualitative data (what is a rep's first response to receiving feedback, do they feel unmotivated by feedback and why, etc.). The survey was distributed to PCC reps through their work email address, with the option of replying to the email to have the link sent to a personal email address instead. Since my target participant population was only PCC reps, email allowed me to deliver the survey link directly to them in a time-saving method.

Survey Content

The survey consisted of 15 questions of varying topics ranging from generic population data to emotional responses from receiving feedback. The questions regarding emotional responses to various aspects of the formal feedback process were aimed at helping to identify if a threat state exists because of the current process; then, if the threat state existed, the remaining questions regarding the frequency of feedback and what aspects PCC reps would change were included to help determine what aspects of the process create a threat state and how that state could be alleviated. Survey questions covered both positive and negative feedback, and aspects of the formal feedback process to help identify potential causes of a threat state (if one is created by formal feedback). The questions were a mixture of multiple choice and free-form response, thereby

allowing PCC reps to explain their emotional states after receiving feedback in their own words.

Coding

My survey featured mostly free-form response questions, so I coded the responses via QDA Miner Lite. I utilized open coding for my analysis, meaning I did not use pre-determined codes; instead, I used the responses themselves to determine the codes. I worked through the responses for each question separately at first, and I began on a more granular level; some of the first codes I created from the responses were *negative*, *failure*, and *wrong*. As the amount of codes grew, I started to look for high-level codes that I could group other codes into, and I did this with other questions in a similar vein. This means all of the questions about negative emotions associated with feedback were coded together and kept separately from the coding for the questions about emotions associated with receiving positive feedback. This process continued until coding was completed for each group of questions and major themes like *afraid to fail*, *helps me grow*, *embarrassed I made a mistake*, and *negative feedback makes me feel defeated* could be confidently determined from the qualitative data.

Data Correlation

Two of my survey questions asked for demographic information; one question inquired about the rep's tenure in the PCC, and one question asked their current position (rep or senior rep). As part of my data analysis, I use this demographic data to correlate if certain emotional responses are related to position and/or tenure in the PCC; additionally, I use this information to determine if any potential threat state is more prominent in one position or tenure over the other. These correlations were completed by creating cross tabulations in Qualtrics (included in the results section) and comparing simple percentages that I calculated for the number of responses per either tenure or position out of the total. These percentages were then used as part of the analysis to determine if there was a correlation between position and/or tenure in the PCC and a negative emotional response to feedback.

Limitations

As the focus of my survey and subsequent data analysis is specific to the feedback process involving the [REDACTED] Feedback Form, it is important to note that feedback in the PCC occurs in other ways. PCC reps can be given feedback through face-to-face interactions or their QA evaluations mentioned earlier, however those avenues posed a much larger research project that I would not have time for during the completion of my applied project. The type of feedback reps were asked in the survey to discuss, only feedback regarding errors in their work (negative in nature), is another limitation to my project. Feedback can also be positive reinforcement of a job well done, and my project does not negate this type of feedback; rather, I assumed for my applied project that positive feedback would not cause a threat state within the rep.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I present the results and subsequent analysis in which I concluded a threat state exists in the PCC due to the feedback process. First, I discuss the results of

the survey itself. Then, I focus on the data related to determining the presence of a threat state before moving on to the data related to identifying aspects of the feedback process that could be potential causes of the threat state.

Survey Results

The survey garnered responses from 11 reps out of the 50 in the PCC, giving me a response rate of 22% (11/50 and multiplied by 100%). I then calculated the margin of error for my survey at ± 14 at a 95% confidence interval ($\pm 14 = 98/\sqrt{50}$); this number was important to remember when completing the analysis for my report as this number shows how reflective my survey data is of the entire PCC. The margin of error for my report is quite high due to smaller target population I was working with (i.e., the PCC). The response rate and the margin of error work hand-in-hand; the response rate provides an indication of how representative the data collected in the survey is of the entire population surveyed, and the margin of error shows how reliable that representation is. Despite the low response rate and high margin of error, I concluded the data obtained from the survey convincingly showed that a threat state does exist due to the formal feedback process, and that the causes of the threat state are two-fold: the delivery method of the feedback and the frequency of the feedback.

The response pool (n=11), was a combination of PCC reps (n=4), PCC senior reps (n=6), and one participant chose not to identify their position. The participant pool was varied in terms of tenure within the PCC, spanning 0-6 months (n=2), 7 months to 1 year (n=2), 2-3 years (n=3), 4-5 years (n=1), 6 or more years (n=1), and those who chose not to respond to the question (n=2). No other identifying information was solicited on the survey, as the results were aimed at being kept as anonymous as possible for participant information safety.

Determining the Threat State

The first goal of the survey was to determine if, in fact, the current formal feedback process in the PCC creates a threat state within PCC reps. 8 of the 11 reps who responded (73%) reported that they either only (n=6/11) or mostly (n=2/11) receive negative feedback via the formal feedback process while the remaining 27% of reps (n=3/11) reported that they receive a combination of negative and positive feedback via the form. Based on this information, the majority of feedback provided to PCC reps via this method is negative in nature; however, as previously mentioned, a threat state is not the negative feedback itself, but rather a negative emotional response to either positive or negative feedback.

When asked about receiving positive feedback via the form, 64% of reps reported that it made them feel confident, inspired, or happy (n=7/11), while the other 36% (n=4/11) reported that positive feedback either had no effect on how they feel and that feedback is not something they become emotionally charged over. Additionally, in their free-form responses, PCC reps' responses fell into the pre-set categories listed in the question: confident, inspired, and happy. One outlying response came back under a different theme that had not been previously discussed which was "affirmed". The rep

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who provided this response identified that receiving positive feedback made them feel as though “they were on the right track” with their work.

Figure 1. Emotional responses to positive feedback.

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	Confident		4	36.36%
2	Inspired		2	18.18%
3	Uncomfortable		0	0.00%
4	Happy		1	9.09%
5	Comfortable		0	0.00%
6	Anxious		0	0.00%
7	Other		4	36.36%
	Total		11	100.00%

When it comes to emotional responses to negative feedback, reps were equally as vocal. 45% of reps (n=5/11) reported that negative feedback via the form made them feel ashamed or defensive. One rep noted that negative feedback makes them feel determined to not make the same mistake again, but this sentiment was matched in a few free-form responses as reps noted themes of thankfulness and learning. 45% (n=5) of reps responded in their own words, and of those responses, 3 reps noted themes of feeling defeated, punished, and embarrassed. These emerging themes from PCC rep responses all reside under the overall umbrella of negative emotional responses, thus showing that 73% of reps (n=8/11) associate receiving negative feedback via the form with a negative emotional response, or, in other words, a threat state.

Now that a threat state has been determined to exist, I analyzed the survey responses to see if the threat state was more common within reps or senior reps (see table 2). When comparing responses for how negative feedback makes them feel, 33% of senior reps (n=2/6) and 50% of reps (n=2/4) responded that it makes them feel ashamed. Additionally, one rep (25%, n=1/4) noted that it made them feel determined and one rep (25%, n=1/4) noted it made them feel defensive. Interesting to note here is that while no reps selected “Other” for this question, 67% (n=4/6) senior reps did, and these reps provided thoughts in their own words (see Table 1). Coding the responses from this

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question only resulted in overall themes of failure, lack of motivation, and that feedback is necessary for growth. Based on these results, senior reps seemingly react more negatively towards feedback, though it is important to remember that more senior reps completed the survey than reps.

Table 1. Emotional responses to negative feedback.

Ashamed	Determined	Defensive	Other
Knowing that you may have given someone wrong			
that I made a mistake			
	I vow to myself to not make the same mistake again.		
		Which isn't the correct response, I know, but sometimes it feels so out of the blue I can't help it. The presence of a cc'd supervisor or lead team makes me much more so though	
			I feel a little embarrassed. A little ashamed that I messed up. But overall understand that feedback is necessary for growth.
			It is circumstantial to how it is filled out. Mostly it makes me feel fine and confident from the learning of my error that I won't create the same error again. If the form is very negative I feel defeated.
			Being copied to the entire leadership team broadcasts any shortcomings and failures. It is the opposite of praise in public and coach in private.
			No feeling-is just something to acknowledge/learn from
			Thankful that I can learn from my mistakes

Between reps and senior reps, then, I decided to see if tenure in position also played a factor in who was more apt to experience the threat state. From the survey, tenure was fairly spread out amongst the two positions in the PCC. One less rep responded to this question than they did for the question about position, but the tenure breakdown is as follows: 33.3% of reps (n=1/3) and 16.6% of senior reps (n=1/6) reported being in the PCC for 0-6 months; another 33.3% of reps (n=1/3) and 16.6% of senior reps have tenure of 7 months to 1 year; 50% of senior reps and no reps reported tenure of 2-3 years; the final 16.6% of senior reps reported tenure of 4-5 years while the remaining 33.3% of reps have tenure of 6 or more years. Table 3 shows the breakdown of tenure and position in terms of survey responses.

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Table 2. How negative feedback makes reps feel based on their position.

		Q4. How does receiving negative formal feedback on the [redacted] form make you feel? Please explain...						Total
		Inspired	Angry	Ashamed	Determined	Defensive	Other	
Q14. What position do you hold in the PCC?	Representative	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
	Senior Representative	0	0	2	0	0	4	6
	Total	0	0	4	1	1	4	10

Table 3. Tenure as it relates to position in the PCC.

		Q15. How long have you been working in the PCC?					Total
		0-6 months	7 months-1 year	2-3 years	4-5 years	6 or more years	
Q14. What position do you hold in the PCC?	Representative	1	1	0	0	1	3
	Senior Representative	1	1	3	1	0	6
	Total	2	2	3	1	1	9

When comparing tenure to negative emotions associated with receiving feedback, I can determine if more or less tenure is correlated to experiencing a threat state when receiving negative feedback. Table 4 provides a breakdown to how reps and senior reps feel about receiving negative feedback based on their tenure within the PCC. Reps at all levels of tenure noted negative reactions associated with receiving feedback. In the 0-6 months tenure range, 50% of reps (n=1/2) noted they felt ashamed when receiving feedback, while the other 50% (n=1/2) felt determined to improve. 100% of reps with tenure of 7 months-1 year reported feeling ashamed or defensive. Next, 100% of reps with tenure of 2-3 years reported “Other” as their response, which, as previously noted, the coding analysis of the responses to this question showed overall negative themes of reactions (refer to Table 1 for the responses). The final two tenures, 4-5 years and 6 or more years both showed 100% of reps responding with negative reactions as well.

Table 4. Reactions to negative feedback based on tenure.

		Q4. How does receiving negative formal feedback on the [redacted] form make you feel? Please explain...						Total
		Inspired	Angry	Ashamed	Determined	Defensive	Other	
Q15. How long have you been working in the PCC?	0-6 months	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	7 months-1 year	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
	2-3 years	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
	4-5 years	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	6 or more years	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	0	0	3	1	1	4	9

In summation, based on my analysis, tenure and position seem to have little effect on whether the threat state exists or not; the results are inconclusive. Position may play a role as senior reps reported more negative reactions to receiving feedback, however more research is needed to understand the relationship between tenure, position, and feedback.

Identifying Aspects Causing a Threat State

The first aspect of the feedback process identified in the survey is the [redacted] Feedback Form. PCC reps, when provided with an image of the form reported

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overwhelmingly (82%, n=9) that they do not feel the form is missing any details or sections, while one rep reported they feel the form could be improved by providing a space to note how the issue or situation resulting in feedback was discovered. None of the reps commented on other aspects of the form such as color scheme, verbiage, or layout. The data, then, overwhelmingly clears the feedback form of suspicion for causing the threat state.

The second aspect of the feedback process that was discussed was the delivery of the form. PCC reps were asked about delivery methods in two different ways. First, reps were asked if the standard delivery method for the form, embedded in an email, affects the way they feel about the feedback itself. 64% of reps reported no, and some went so far as to call out that this process actually allows them to easily archive the feedback as it is delivered. 27% of reps reported that emailing the form to them does affect how they feel about the feedback, noting overall that this method feels cold or impersonal (see Table 5). One rep chose not to respond to this question. In a later question asking reps if there was anything else they would like to say about the feedback process, one rep noted that they would prefer a smaller audience be included on these emails. The rep went on to say that if the feedback was only sent to them and their supervisor, this would lessen their negative emotional response; however, when other individuals are included, specifically the director of the PCC, this heightens their emotional response to feedback. This is an interesting point to consider, but as this was only discussed by one rep, it would be safe to assume that delivering the form by email is not a cause of the threat state.

The next way delivery method was approached was by asking if who sends the feedback to the rep affects how they feel about the feedback. The question delineated between either other peers outside of the PCC or from the rep's supervisor. PCC reps were nearly split evenly regarding this aspect, with 55% of reps reporting no and 45% reporting yes. For those reporting no, reps noted in their responses that they appreciate feedback from any source as feedback is seen as a learning opportunity. For those who reported yes, all responded that the feedback is easier to accept from their supervisor rather than an individual outside of the PCC, so their emotional response would change in relation to who sends the feedback (see Table 5).

When coding the responses to this question, the overall themes were mixed. Some themes like "appreciative of feedback" and "any feedback is an opportunity" support feedback coming from anyone as it does not affect how they feel about feedback; the majority of the themes from the responses, however, show that feedback from their supervisor is much easier to handle. Themes such as "impersonal and cold," "trust in direct leadership," and "easier to hear from supervisor" show that reps would react less emotionally negative to receiving feedback than if the feedback was to come from someone outside of the PCC. These reps also noted that when their supervisor provides the feedback, it tends to be more thoughtful and it causes the rep to become less defensive. One other notable response to this question came from a rep who responded no and stated this was because who was sending the feedback did not matter as much as how the feedback was written, specifically, verbiage and phrasing.

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Based on these survey results, it appears that the delivery method cannot be completely removed from the conversation around threat states. Reps were split on their feelings regarding this aspect. While there is a difference between the two response rates, it is notably small, and so far, delivery method for feedback provided the most solid case for being one aspect of the feedback process that causes a threat state.

I then moved on to analyzing the frequency of receiving feedback to determine if this was an aspect causing a threat state. 82% of reps, an overwhelming majority, reported they received feedback via the form 1 to 3 times per month, and 9% reported a higher frequency of 4 to 6 times per month (and one rep chose not to respond).

Table 5. Does delivery method affect how Reps feel about feedback.

Yes	No
Feels cold / impersonable	
It's very impersonal and does not feel like intended coaching should feel.	
Yes, I don't like it, but for the sheer sake of efficiency I don't know how it would change	
	Hard to think of how else to deliver the feedback.
	No affect
	I like having the ability to archive them.

Reps were then explicitly asked if this frequency affected how the feedback made them feel, and responses were not as drastically different. 36% of reps reported yes, that the frequency of the feedback does affect how they feel, and they noted concerns with feeling inundated, overwhelmed, defeated, and singled out (see Table 6). Some reps called out that if they receive multiple feedback forms within one week, that increased their negative emotional reaction to feedback. 64% of reps, then, reported that no, the frequency does not affect their feelings towards feedback. Most of these reps simply reiterated that feedback does not cause an emotional reaction within them, but one rep noted that they crave feedback as that is how they improve, implying that a higher frequency of feedback would actually improve their emotional response.

Despite the amount of responses for yes being lower than no, there are some key points to call out within the responses for yes. Inundated, overwhelmed, defeated, singled out are all negative responses to feedback, and thus putting the rep in a threat state. With reps identifying these emotions in their responses, and then noting that when the frequency increases so does their emotional response, the frequency of feedback being sent to the reps does play a part in creating a threat state. Coding these responses revealed overall themes of “lower confidence” and “singled out for criticism” showing that frequency of feedback delivered is another aspect of the feedback process that could be causing the threat state.

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Table 6. Does frequency of receiving feedback affects emotional responses to feedback.

Yes	No
I don't receive it often but if I did it would effect my confidence	
1-3 a month makes you feel like the work your doing is being monitored and valued. More than that begins to feel like your not performing your job well and maybe even picked on. Even though I'm sure it doesnt come from a place of malice.	
It's a conundrum. Too much, and I feel like I'm terrible at my job. Too little, and I feel like I'm making mistakes in the background.	
if there are several in 1 week I feel more inundated and become hyper aware of everything I do	
	I crave receiving feedback. It's the only way to get better!
	have gotten one
	Does not cause emotional response

Recommendations and Next Steps

In analyzing the results of my survey, I determined that using the feedback process involving the [REDACTED] Feedback Form causes a threat state within PCC reps. PCC reps identified two main causes of the threat state: delivery method and frequency. Reps noted their negative emotional responses to feedback would be lessened if the [REDACTED] Feedback Form was sent to a smaller audience. Additionally, reps noted that a reduced frequency in being given feedback would help reduce their negative emotional responses as well.

Based on my analysis of these results, there are several aspects of the feedback process within the PCC that I am recommending be improved upon to reduce the threat state reps who responded experienced when receiving feedback: the current delivery method, and the frequency of feedback sent to the rep. These recommendations are based solely on the results of the survey as the low response rate makes it difficult to say that these results are representative of the entire PCC.

Delivery Method

My recommendation for enhancing the delivery method is to have the completed feedback form emailed directly to the rep's supervisor to review and disseminate to their rep. In the survey responses for the questions related to delivery method, 10 reps provided thoughts on how the delivery could be improved. The reps providing these ideas also responded that the current delivery method causes them to react negatively towards feedback. One rep noted that they would prefer the [REDACTED] feedback form is only sent to them and their direct supervisor. This rep noted that when other [REDACTED] in leadership or director-level positions are cc'd on the email with the feedback, it increases their negative emotional response. Another rep noted they would prefer the form is sent directly to their supervisor and then their supervisor openly discusses this feedback with them. While this method would potentially delay learning depending on how quickly the

supervisor can connect with the rep and also the nature of the feedback itself, this is still interesting to consider. Sending the feedback directly to the supervisor allows the supervisor a chance to review the feedback and the error and find the best way to communicate this information to their rep to achieve a high level of understanding.

This ties into the question from the survey asking reps if receiving feedback from their supervisor changes their working relationship with them. 73% of reps (n=8) reported no, it does not change the working relationship as they expect their supervisor to be providing them with feedback as part of that relationship. Additionally, as a rep noted when asked if their feeling towards feedback changes depending on who the feedback comes from, a rep's supervisor knows the work context surrounding the error better for their rep than an individual outside of the PCC would. This update will help tie the current feedback process in with rep expectations of their supervisor.

Frequency of Feedback

To help alleviate negative emotions associated with the frequency of receiving feedback, I recommend (as an echo of the previous recommendation) that feedback be sent directly to the rep's supervisor. As noted in the data analysis, 36% of reps reported that receiving multiple feedback forms per month, and even week, increases the negative emotional response they experience. By sending feedback forms directly to a rep's supervisor instead of the rep directly, the supervisor can determine the immediacy of the feedback and/or combine feedback together depending on the topic and provide it to their rep during a 1:1 meeting (which happens monthly). This would reduce the frequency of feedback down to as little as once per month, and since the feedback would be coming from their supervisor, this would help alleviate two causes of negative emotional responses.

Further Research and Recommendations

Keeping the low response rate and high margin of error in mind, further research should be completed on the formal feedback process in the PCC. As I mentioned earlier in my project, the limitations to my project could pose new veins of research. Looking into whether or not positive feedback creates a threat state in certain situations could expand the recommendations for alleviating stress at the rep level. Additionally, and perhaps critical to the continued success within the PCC, the processes for providing feedback via other avenues should be researched as well.

One other item to include in additional research that was not focused on for this report would be verbiage; I am curious if using the term "coaching" instead of "feedback" (as I mentioned earlier in this report) has any effect on how rep's feel about feedback. Additionally, further research would help determine if the recommended changes above have an effect on those reps that reported being placed in a negative emotional state. This additional research will help determine if the changes made were actually an integral part of the threat state created by the feedback process and if the changes were successful in improving the experience for reps. Worth noting as well, is that beyond the formatting of form itself, this case study did not address varying

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communication styles between individuals or look at if this process creates a threat state in a rep if they use the form to send feedback to a [REDACTED] in another department.

One final recommendation I propose is based not on survey results but on my content analysis of the [REDACTED] Feedback Form. The form itself has many outdated features and could use a general overhaul to bring it up to date. To start with, adding a section on the form to explain how an error was noticed in a rep's work would provide additional context for where this error was visible, which, in turn, could provide insight on how to avoid this in the future thereby continuing the education for the rep.

Additional changes I am recommending are mostly cosmetic in nature but would help streamline the form and could increase comprehension of the feedback provided. First, I am recommending the verbiage of the last section on the form be updated to reflect the current case management system, including the knowledgebase. This means removing "PRIMUS Solution" as that was the previous system and updating to "ROAST KBA," where KBA is understood to stand for knowledgebase answer. I am also recommending that the actual section for feedback be split into two sections: one for the feedback itself and one that is a checkbox denoting whether or not follow up is needed on the feedback. This will help the supervisor, as well as the rep, quickly determine if immediate action is needed on the feedback, or if the feedback was simply to notify an error had been made. Next, I recommend the title of the form, [REDACTED] Feedback Form, be updated to reflect the organizational changes that the PCC recently went through; the new name should read GSS Feedback Form to show that the PCC is now organized under GSS rather than PRO as that will help stifle confusion around organizational alignments. Lastly, if these updates are made to the form, the directions for how to use the form will need to be updated accordingly.

Conclusion

Achieving understanding is the end result of effective communication between communicator and audience. Understanding between two parties can help facilitate learning, and in the feedback genre, that is the ultimate goal. Each company or individual may have their own process for delivering feedback, but if even one aspect of the feedback process causes a misunderstanding, then emotions can flare and learning can be hindered. These misunderstandings can be emotional responses, such as threat states, that cause individuals to negatively react towards feedback and not grasp the learning embedded in the feedback. In the PCC, certain aspects of the current feedback process can occasionally cause threat states within reps, but through further research and adjustments to the process, achieving a stronger understanding and increasing learning is possible.

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Appendix

A. The [REDACTED] Feedback Form

Feedback Form

Please complete this form to provide feedback to [REDACTED]

How to complete Feedback:

1. Fill in table with feedback information. If follow up action is required by the partner receiving feedback, indicate such and what steps are needed in the 'Feedback' section.
2. Copy table and paste into email; please don't attach as a file.
3. In subject line of email, indicate that the email is feedback for ([REDACTED] name), case # or topic for feedback.
 - a. Example: Feedback for Jane Doe regarding case 1234567
4. Email the feedback to the following:
 - a. [REDACTED] receiving the feedback
 - b. cc supervisor of [REDACTED] receiving feedback (for PCC, send to [DL – PCCSup](#))

Please Note:

- If the supervisor is *cc'd*, the sender will no longer receive a reply from them.
- If feedback is not sent directly to the [REDACTED] the supervisor will reply to the sender and follow-up with their rep as needed.

[REDACTED] receiving feedback	
Description line or topic of feedback	
Case # (if applicable)	
Feedback/Follow up action required by [REDACTED] receiving feedback	
Resources to reference (PRIMUS solution, doc on SharePoint, etc.)	

B. The Survey Completed by PCC Reps

1. For the purposes of this study, formal feedback in the [REDACTED] is defined as feedback provided directly to you on the [REDACTED] Feedback Form by

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- either your supervisor or a [REDACTED] from another department. Have you received this type of feedback in the PCC?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
2. For what purpose is feedback on the [REDACTED] form provided to you?
- a. Only identifying an error in my work
 - b. Mostly identifying an error in my work
 - c. A combination of identifying an error and acknowledgement of work well-done
 - d. Mostly acknowledgement of work well-done
 - e. Only acknowledgement of work well-done
3. How does receiving positive formal feedback on the [REDACTED] form make you feel? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Confident
 - b. Inspired
 - c. Uncomfortable
 - d. Happy
 - e. Comfortable
 - f. Anxious
 - g. Other
4. How does receiving negative formal feedback on the [REDACTED] form make you feel? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Inspired
 - b. Angry
 - c. Ashamed
 - d. Determined
 - e. Defensive
 - f. Other
5. Does the feeling you selected for Question #4 change depending on whether another [REDACTED] outside of the PCC or your supervisor is providing you the feedback? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Here is an image of the [REDACTED] Feedback Form. From your perspective, do you feel the form is missing anything?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
7. The completed [REDACTED] Feedback Form is sent to you by copying the form and embedding it into an email. Does this delivery method affect the way feedback makes you feel? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.

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- a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Would you prefer the [REDACTED] Feedback form, and therefore feedback, is delivered to you another way? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. When your manager provides you formal feedback in the PCC, does that change your relationship at work with them? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Depends
10. When you receive negative formal feedback in the PCC, how do you react?
- a. I take action right away to correct the behavior.
 - b. I become insecure and defensive.
 - c. I worry about keeping my job.
 - d. I internalize my feelings and become unresponsive.
 - e. I take time to thoroughly think about the feedback and respond to it with a clear head.
 - f. Other. Please explain.
11. How often would you say you receive formal feedback in the PCC?
- a. 1-3 times per month
 - b. 4-6 times per month
 - c. 7-9 times per month
 - d. 10 or more times per month
12. Does how often (the frequency) you receive formal feedback affect how formal feedback makes you feel? Please explain your selection in the accompanying text box.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. Is there anything else you would like to say about feedback in the PCC or the [REDACTED] form?
- a. Text box
14. What position do you hold in the PCC?
- a. Representative
 - b. Senior representative
15. How long have you been working in the PCC?

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- a. 0-6 months
- b. 7 months-1 year
- c. 2-3 years
- d. 4-5 years
- e. 6+ years