

Cultivating Accountability by Eliciting Upward Feedback

Session Proposal (60-minute presentation)

Presenters

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Proposal

In many work environments, regular staff performance evaluations are the norm, and this practice has real impact on staff promotion opportunities and raises. However, this process is typically top down, i.e., the supervisor evaluates the supervisee. Often employees do not have the opportunity to evaluate their supervisor in turn. This norm of personnel evaluation potentially creates barriers for staff to express their needs as workers, as well as for supervisors to listen, learn, and grow.

This presentation will outline how two newer middle managers at different institutions approached seeking upward feedback from their direct reports. They will discuss what inspired them, how they implemented upward feedback opportunities, what feedback they received from their colleagues, and their reflections since then. For both managers, this process provided crucial feedback and set a precedent to repeat the feedback loop throughout their careers to foster a more open, inclusive, and equitable work environment.

We will draw upon published research on mechanisms of accountability within organizations (particularly within relationships with power differentials) while narrating our own lived experiences. Throughout we will create opportunities for reflection from attendees by posing questions in an Etherpad, such as:

- We must make explicit both *to whom* and *for what* we owe accountability. What are managers accountable to their direct reports for?
- What are some necessary conditions for direct reports to feel safe enough to be candid when offering feedback to their managers? How can managers create these conditions?
- How do we operationalize accountability to direct reports? How do we design trustworthy processes, independent of the individuals occupying management roles?

Identity, background, institutional affiliation, lived experience

Chelcie — I am a White, cis, hetero, able-bodied woman. I supervise people who have intersecting identities different from my own: queer, nonbinary, trans, Latina, Jewish, immigrant, among others. I take seriously the responsibility of creating the conditions for my direct reports to flourish in their work roles while being their authentic selves. I try to use my positional power (either as a manager, or as White woman) to benefit colleagues who are less able to speak up. I have informal mentoring relationships with early-career BIPoC colleagues. While serving on search committees I've critiqued language about *professionalism* as code for *satisfactory performance of whiteness*. I know I have blind

spots. I am grateful when people point them out to me. This conference presentation is about creating more formal processes for managers to learn their blind spots and address them.

Hannah — I am a Black, cis, hetero, able-bodied woman who rocks her natural hair. I supervise people whose identity differs from my own but is fairly homogeneous. I am a believer that work lives, though hopefully balanced with our personal, are linked and blend with what we do outside of work. It is essential, therefore, as a supervisor to acknowledge and support those we work with as full individuals. I aim to create an environment where people feel heard, respected, included, and supported. Much of my approach to leadership and mentoring comes from both positive and negative experiences as a Black woman in, initially, archaeology (white male dominated field) and then librarianship (white female dominated). I am cognizant of my own privileges and am constantly learning about my own biases through candid conversations, continued education, and participating in affinity group check-ins and real talk that emphasizes my humanity. This presentation re-centers the development of management as a human rather than a pipeline process.

Audience

New managers

Aspiring managers

Experienced managers

Tags

Communication and transparency

Advocacy and relationship building

Supervision, evaluation, and other personnel topics

Organizational climate and culture, retention, and growth

Team building and team cultivation

Motivation and empowerment