Exploring New Frontiers in Multi-Rater Feedback

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OVERVIEW

• What is the Jet Propulsion Laboratory?
• Upward Feedback Program Goals
• Upward Feedback Process
• Attributes of the Program
What is the Jet Propulsion Laboratory?

- Managed for NASA by the California Institute of Technology
- Lead U.S. center for robotic exploration of the solar system
- Facts:
  - Approximately 5500 employees
  - Main site (177 acres) is 12 miles northeast of Los Angeles
  - Last launch: April 7, 2001 – 2001 Mars Odyssey – Kennedy Space Center
JPL Mission

Expand the frontiers of space by conducting challenging robotic space missions for NASA.

- *Explore our solar system.*
- *Expand our knowledge of the universe.*
- *Further our understanding of Earth from the perspective of space.*
- *Pave the way for human exploration.*

Apply our special capabilities to technical and scientific problems of national significance.
JPL Values

• OPENNESS •
Openness of our people and our processes. We use candid communication to ensure better results.

• INTEGRITY •
Integrity of the individual and the institution. We value honesty and trust in the way we treat one another and in the way we meet our commitments.

• QUALITY •
Integrity of our products and our people. We carry out our mission with a commitment to excellence in both what we do and how we do it.

• INNOVATION •
Innovation in our processes and products. We value employee creativity in accomplishing tasks.
How Does JPL work?

• Research and development organization
  – Inventive
  – Innovative
  – Highly educated
  – Value technology and science
  – “Nothing we can’t do” attitude

• Matrix organization
  – Line vs. Project Management
What was the Impetus for Starting an Upward Feedback Program?

- **1992** TQM
- **1993** JPL Employee Survey
  - Interpersonal & leadership skills
  - Work-group needs
- **1994** Management Effectiveness Process Action Team
  - Improve manager effectiveness & interactions with employees
- **1996-97** Round 1 of Upward Feedback – Required
- **1999** Round 2 of Upward Feedback – Voluntary
- **2000** Round 3 of Upward Feedback – Voluntary
Upward Feedback Program Goals

1. Initiate candid and constructive, two-way dialogue leading to balanced feedback for the manager regarding her/his management style
2. Develop, implement, and assess action plans to enhance manager and work-group communications and increase productivity
3. Create an environment for ongoing open dialogue between manager and work-group
Upward Feedback Process

Step 1: Decide to participate--tell work-group

Step 2: Complete online survey

Step 3: Compile data, generate reports

Step 4: Review report, coach manager

Step 5: Facilitate work group discussion, preliminary action plan

Step 6: Implement action plan

Step 7: Assess implementation
Round 3 Survey Format

• Questions are grouped into 10 dimensions
  – 44 quantitative questions
  – 10 comment sections (one per dimension) to capture qualitative data
• Administered via Internet
  – Paper copies available as needed

The Ten Dimensions:
  • Basic Communication
  • Direction and Feedback
  • Empowerment
  • Investment in People
  • Resource Management
  • Teaming
  • Performance Focus
  • Leadership
  • Upward Feedback Past Performance
  • Employee Change Goals
Attributes of the Current Program

The Upward Feedback Program:

- Is voluntary
- Maintains anonymity and confidentiality
- Is a developmental tool
- Provides balanced feedback
- Promotes accountability for both manager and employees
Upward Feedback is *Voluntary*

- Eligible managers volunteer to participate in program

**Eligibility requirements**

- Must manage a minimum number of 5 employees
- Must have been in his/her management position for at least 6 months or more
Upward Feedback is
*Anonymous & Confidential*

- Survey data is collected by an external consultant
- Work-groups with less than 4 respondents, or less than 75% participation in survey, are excluded
- All individual identifiers and names are deleted prior to JPL access to database (database goes to Upward Feedback team only)
- Feedback meeting contains component of open forum feedback without the manager’s presence
- Only manager, work-group, facilitator & external consultant have access to survey results
Upward Feedback is *Developmental*

- Emphasis on identification of strengths and improvement opportunities for the sole purpose of manager development, NOT evaluation
- Strengthens the relationships between the manager and the work-group
  - Realization that sometimes work-group behaviors have to change in order for manager’s behaviors to change
- Action plans are created with work-group
  - Allows managers to adjust their behavior to goals set out in plan
Upward Feedback is *Balanced Feedback*

Positive reinforcement of the leader’s strengths as well as an awareness of their improvement opportunities

– Both the initial feedback session between the manager and the facilitator and the session with the work-group, are designed to acknowledge strengths before investigating improvement opportunities
Upward Feedback *Promotes Accountability*

- Manager and work-group co-create action plan
- Action plan is the only document shared with the manager’s manager
- 90 day facilitated check-in measures manager’s progress on action plan
Future Frontiers to Explore

- Require participation for first time managers who have been in current position for one year
- Voluntary participation for seasoned managers
- Pilot 360 degree feedback program for Program and Project Managers
- Revisit original survey and explore need to redesign
Summary

Upward Feedback is a relatively new program at JPL. The process is constantly evolving and continuously improving to strategically meet the needs of the institution, managers, and employees.