

Positive Criticism in Management

Name:

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Criticism is often perceived as an expression of a negative attitude toward a person or an issue and, therefore, tends to be associated with a demotivating effect in terms of performance. However, human resource management also distinguishes positive criticism as a form of providing well-intended feedback that focuses on the positive aspects of an action or behavior. This less-frequently used technique has the potential to dissolve the demotivating impact of negative feedback, prevent productivity reduction by enhancing an employee's morale, and ultimately maximizing performance by correcting inefficiencies in the work process by pointing them out from a positive perspective.

Criticism is perceived as an adverse concept, but its use in the workplace is unavoidable. However, the mainstream approach to criticism, which involves the identification and communication of the inefficiencies of an action or behavior usually has negative effects. As it has been found in a study, the emotional response of an employee is six times stronger to negative feedback than to a positive one (Pozen, 2013). Such an approach to pointing out imperfections does not help managers to correct the work of employees, but generally reduces their morale. From a psychological perspective, negative criticism reduces an employee's self-confidence and faith in his or her ability to achieve goals, as well as expectations of succeeding in anything in general (Fishbach, Eyal & Finkelstein, 2010). In turn, positive criticism is not associated with such adverse impacts and has extensive implications for human resource management. This managerial tool provides the flexibility to merge the pointing out of inefficiencies with constructive comments on what could be done to eliminate them while

indicating positive aspects. Moreover, the use of positive criticism allows human resource management to dissolve the demotivating effects of negative feedback. Specifically, since it is sometimes impossible to indicate evident deficiencies by using negative feedback, the combination of negative and positive criticism at the ratio of 5.6:1 has been empirically found to be the ideal proportion for adverse impact elimination (Folkman, 2013). Therefore, upon correct application, human resource management may use positive criticism effectively to mitigate the demotivating impact of negative criticism and feedback.

Besides reducing the negative effects of negative feedback, positive criticism may also be used to prevent the reduction in productivity by enhancing an employee's morale. From the perspective of motivation theories, positive criticism functions by boosting a person's confidence in the ability to achieve a goal and contributing to the expectations of a successful outcome rather than a failure (Fishbach, Eyal & Finkelstein, 2010). Besides, this human resource management tool allows for preventing productivity reduction by establishing the circumstances under which employees do not react negatively to the feedback they receive but, instead, expands their self-concept and gets a more detailed idea about what needs to be completed. It occurs because positive criticism has a corrective rather than suppressive effect, since the receiver of such a message focuses on the content of the feedback rather than the conveyed negative emotions (Pozen, 2013). Even though a person receives a critique of actions or behavior, such comments pertain to deficiencies from a positive perspective and do not suppress the accomplishments that have been made. Moreover, positive criticism allows an employee to concentrate on the learning aspect of the message delivered, which, due to the unreduced morale,

allows preventing the decrease in productivity (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, this approach to giving feedback has broad implications for human resource management, as it allows sustaining an employee's morale while pointing out the aspects that require corrections.

Positive criticism does not only serve as a preventive measure against the adverse impact of negative feedback, as it may be used by human resource management to maximize employees' performance by correcting inefficiencies in their work. When a person receives feedback that pertains to successful actions or a critique of unsuccessful actions from a positive perspective, it serves as a signal to increase commitment and performance, because previous actions resulted in encouragement (Fishbach, Eyal & Finkelstein, 2010). In other words, the application of positive criticism contributes to an employee's understanding that a particular behavior or actions is approved of, and similar conduct is likely to result in positive feedback, too. At the same time, the incorporation of constructive critique of incorrectly performed actions is not likely to reduce the encouraging effects, as it does not involve pressure but includes corrections from a positive perspective. Therefore, an employee receiving positive criticism is motivated to correct mistakes but perform praised actions to pursue the goal of receiving such positive feedback rather than negative critique in the future.

Criticism does not necessarily need to be associated with negative implications for employees, because it can be delivered with a focus on positive aspects. Such positive criticism does not only override the detrimental effects of negative critique, which is unavoidable sometimes, but it also may be used to enhance productivity. Ultimately, human resource management may use positive criticism to maximize employees' performance by improving their

self-concept, boosting confidence in the correct approach, and signaling that the identified deficiencies are communicated to improve the quality of work rather than suppress or cause a negative response.

References

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