

Performance Enhancement among the Faculty Members of the University of Livingstonia, Laws Campus through Feedback Giving and Receiving

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Abstract

A study was carried out in 2015 and 2016 to evaluate the perceptions of staff of the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus, regarding feedback giving and receiving and how it relates to work performance. The study used an exploratory research design in order to dig deeper into the ideas and insights of feedback giving and receiving as understood by the staff of the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus. Data were subjected to simple correlation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) where relevant and differences in the means were separated using Fishers Least Significant Difference (lsd) at 0.05 level of significance.

The findings of this study have shown that feedback is not correcting someone of their wrongs. Among other key findings, sixty percent of the support staff said one has to always prepare for giving feedback. And, seventy-four percent of the academic staff said feedback is not necessarily telling someone of the bad things or their wrong doing. A surprising finding also comes from managers in which case 50 percent said feedback is telling someone of their wrong-doing sometimes. In terms of the need for qualification when giving feedback, 75 percent of the managers said the age, qualification, and experience matters when giving and receiving feedback. All three group of respondents cared if someone will use the feedback given. Academic staff cared at 85.7 percent Managers cared at 75 percent and Support staff cares at 61.1 percent. Finally, 100 percent of the Managers, 100 percent of the Academics, and 77.8 percent of the Support staff said yes feedback enhances an individual or a group of individuals' work-related performance.

Among the key recommendations of the study is that feedback culture be institutionalised in which case tailor-made trainings on feedback and performance-related topics need to be offered to all employees at given intervals. Such topics as soft skills, time management, motivation and many more need to be covered during training. Lessons generated in this study can be applied to any growing university or institution that seeks to enhance the performance of its employees through a feedback culture.

Keywords

Feedback, University of Livingstonia, Performance, Employees, Skills, and Motivation.

1. Introduction

For the past four years, one of the authors has been engaged in a Research Leadership and Management mentorship program with PICO-EA funded by McKnight Foundation CCRP of the United States of America. PICO-EA is based in Kenya. Under this project, participants are put in a setting of mentor-mentee pairs in which case the mentee is supposed to learn from the mentor on several issues bordering on professional development of the mentee in the area of specialisation. Also, the mentee learns key leadership and management skills that would make them be effective in their area of specialisation. I am participating in the project as a mentee.

The activities of this mentorship program are divided into two. The first component comprises the career development of the mentee in their area of specialisation. The second component equips the mentee with leadership and management skills. Both of these components are geared towards making the mentee an effective person in their area of specialisation, for example, agricultural sciences.

One component of practice in the area of leadership and management was for the mentees to carry out a mini-project. The title of the author's mini-project was 'Enhancing feedback between and among faculty members of University of Livingstonia, Laws campus.' It was a literature review kind of research, followed by a series of seminar presentations. Upon conducting the presentations, the author learned that there was more work to be done. That was when the author decided to conduct a mini-survey on feedback giving and receiving in collaboration with the second author. This proposal, therefore, details the conduction of a mini-

research project on feedback culture titled “Performance enhancement among the faculty members of the University of Livingstonia through feedback giving and receiving.”

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the perceptions of staff of the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus, regarding feedback giving and receiving and how it relates to work performance. Specifically, the study was conducted to:

- Determine level of understanding about feedback among administrative, academic, and support staff.
- Assess some aspects of feedback giving and receiving by staff.
- Evaluate the role of feedback on an individual’s work performance within institutional targets.

2. Feedback: Its Role in Individual and Institutional Performance

It is generally believed that there are many forms of feedback. People give feedback in whatever form they deem appropriate. The feedback is given in forms that are verbal and nonverbal. However, it is clear that although there are many forms of feedback, not all these forms are useful feedback (Poertner and Miller, 1996). For feedback to be considered useful, it must be well planned, directed towards certain behaviour, and respond to a specific job or work-related actions which have arisen in the process of doing a particular job (Poertner and Miller, 1996). Useful feedback is aimed at improving the performance of an individual on particular tasks. It is a supporting tool to enhance an individual’s performance related to some set goals (Walker et al., 2010). It is basically a consequence of performance (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Feedback is a very important process in organisational performance management cycles. London and Smither (2002) made several propositions to support the importance of feedback in the performance management cycles of an organisation or an institution. Such propositions include the fact that over time, there will be improved optimism and the willingness to do better by an individual receiving feedback. This is possible if there are positive reactions and emotions in an individual receiving feedback compared to an individual with negative reactions and emotions after feedback. The relationship between feedback receiving and using in the context of the individual’s

understanding of feedback and the organisation's feedback culture is key to the performance management cycle. There is performance enhancement in individual when positive critical events touch specific effective behaviour and competencies.

Feedback needs to be planned. It does not need to be haphazard, non-specific chatter that simply aims at emptying one's chest. Neither does it mean filling some gap with words or simply stating the obvious and just giving a report. It should be specific, accurate, detailed, and a two-way process. Both the giver and the receiver get actively involved in the feedback process in order to make an improvement related to some performance on the planned activity (Poertner and Miller, 1996; Bridgespan, 2003, Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Giving and receiving feedback is a very crucial process for the realisation of effective feedback. The giver needs to plan the feedback. Feedback must target a certain performance behaviour that has to improve in order to achieve the intended performance goals. The receiver also has to be ready to receive the feedback and affect the desired performance improvement (Walker et al., 2010; Hattie and Timperley, 2007). For this to be achieved, the receiver will have to be in a receptive, non-defensive mood. The mood of the receiver will be to a large extent due to preparedness. It is therefore proper for the giver of feedback to prepare the receiver (Walker et al., 2010; London and Smither, 2002). This study is focussed on studying some aspects of feedback giving and receiving among the staff of the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus with an aim of contributing to performance improvement among the faculty members and staff.

3. The Research Methodology

The study used an exploratory research design in order to dig deeper into the ideas and insights (Kothari, 2004) of feedback giving and receiving as understood by the staff of the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus. The specific methodology used to conduct the study was the experience survey (Kothari, 2004) in which a structured questionnaire was used to collect information regarding the experience of the staff when it comes to giving and receiving feedback and how it affects their performance on set goals and tasks. The questionnaire was designed in

such a way that respondents would just choose from the options about feedback that best describes their current knowledge and practices about feedback. By doing this, researchers were able to gain insight into the understanding of the staff on issues related to feedback giving and receiving.

The study was conducted at the University of Livingstonia, Laws campus in November 2015. Laws campus of the University of Livingstonia is the former Overtoun Institute founded and established by Rev. Dr. Robert Laws around 1925, which later became Livingstonia Secondary School and turned to the University of Livingstonia in 2003, fulfilling the dream of Rev. Dr. Robert Laws (Chilenje, 2007; Hinfelaar, 1993). Livingstonia is located at 10. 360 South and 34. 060 East and at an elevation of 1,377.09 meters above sea level (Google Earth, 2012). You reach the institution by climbing up the Nyika plateau through Gordon road, popularised by one medical doctor, Dr. David Gordon who established and worked at the rural hospital in Livingstonia, which was named after him-David Gordon Memorial Hospital (Chilenje, 2007).

Participants in the study were purposefully sampled based on their work positions with the University of Livingstonia staffing system. The names and identities of participants were kept anonymous in order to maintain the objectivity of the study. These participants comprised those in the category of Administrative position, Academic position, and Support staff position. There was 10 staff from the administrative position representing 83 percent of the employees in this category, 25 staff from the academic position which represented 64 percent of the employees in this category, and 30 staff from the support staff position making a 53 percent of the employees in this category. The total study population was 65 people which represented 60 percent of the total staff employee of the institution at this campus.



Figure 1: Google Earth Image showing location of the University of Livingstonia, Laws Campus [Accessed on 2/11/2015]

The variables corrected in this study were grouped into those relating to the general understanding of feedback and how it enhances performance, feedback giving, and receiving. Each category had specific questions targeting certain aspects of feedback as practiced or understood by the respondents (Refer to questionnaire in appendix). The data collected was cleaned, organised, and entered in Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 20 for analysis. The variables were subjected to simple descriptive analyses in order to ascertain certain trends in the data. Examples of such descriptive statistics were means, standard deviations and mode. Variables were further subjected to simple correlation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) where relevant and differences in the means were separated using Fishers Least Significant Difference (lsd) at 0.05 level of significance. The results were reported using tables charts and graphs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The study focused mainly on understanding the perception of the employees of the University of Livingstonia at Laws Campus as to whether feedback giving and receiving could help enhance their work

performance. As such questions that were asked to the employees revolved around basic knowledge of feedback, if there was a need to prepare for giving feedback, if they would like to tell someone their bad things only when giving feedback the relevance of age, qualification, and experience of someone who was giving feedback if the feedback giver cared about the use of feedback by the receiver, and finally, if feedback enhances someone's performance at the workplace or on a given task.

4.2 If feedback is correcting someone about their wrongs

The overall view of the three groups of respondents revealed that feedback is not correcting someone of their wrongs. The managers clearly stated this fact too.

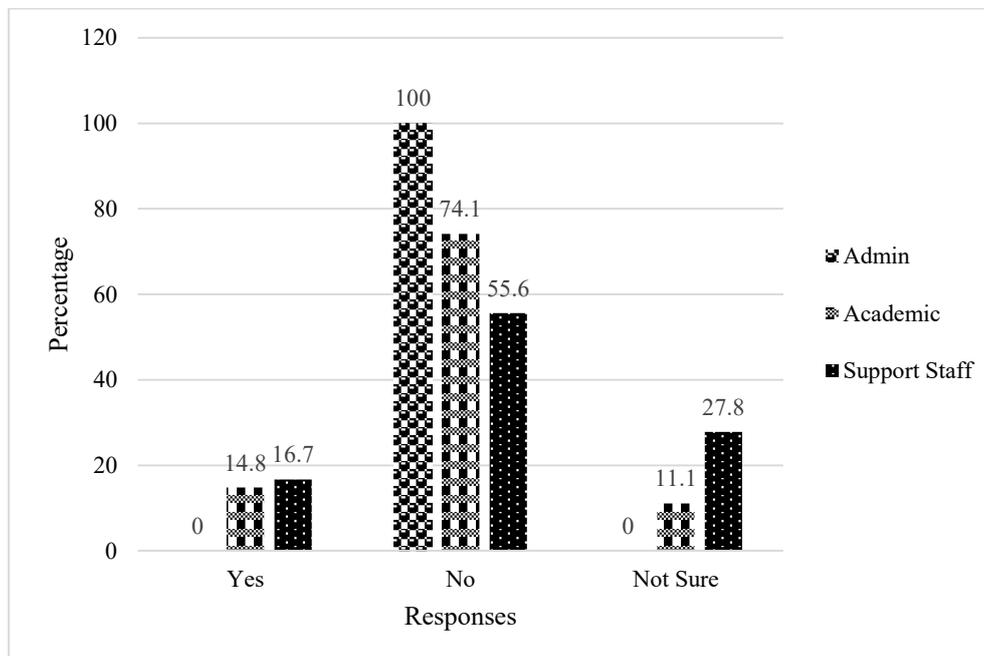


Figure 2: Shows the proportions of responses on whether the feedback is correcting someone of their wrongs or not.

4.3 Need to prepare before giving feedback to someone

One question that comes to mind when thinking about feedback is whether one has to prepare on how they will give the feedback. If they need to do their homework in terms of the feedback that they will give to someone. As such, this study sought out answers to this question. From the responses, half 50 percent of the managers said

one has to prepare for feedback giving always while the other half 50 percent said one has to prepare sometimes. Strikingly, 60 percent of the support staff said one has to always prepare for giving feedback. The summarised responses on whether one has to prepare before giving feedback are shown in Figure 2 below.

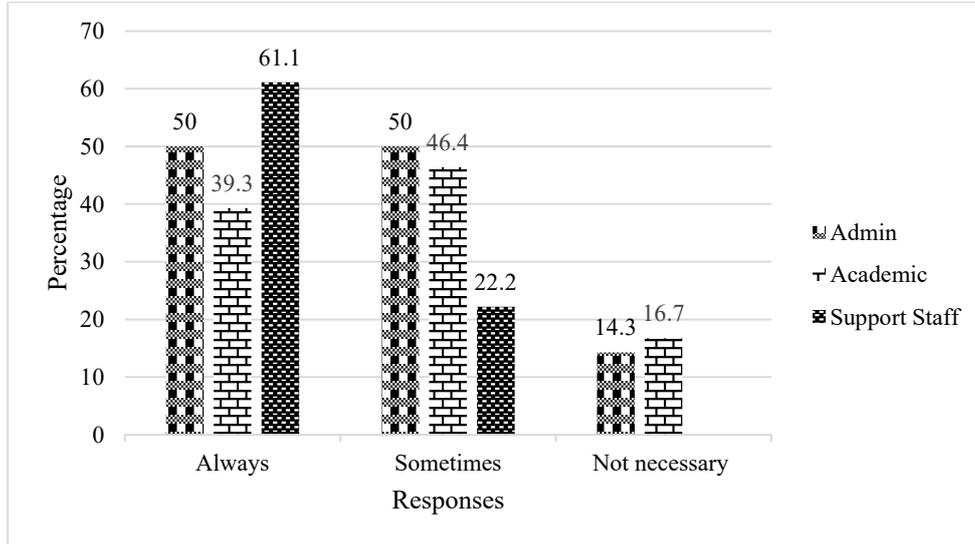


Figure 3: Need to Prepare before Giving Feedback to Someone

4.4 Would like to tell someone their bad things only when giving them feedback

In most circles, it seems that feedback is reporting on something. Sometimes people even talk about giving feedback when they are responding to a question or an issue. To a greater extent, one gets the feeling that feedback is when someone is being told of the bad things they always or mostly to. To understand this last misconception about feedback, respondents in this study were if feedback is to tell someone of their bad things or their wrong doing. In response, 74.4 percent of the academic staff said feedback is not necessarily telling someone of the bad things or their wrong-doing. On the other hand, 44.4 percent of the support staff indicated that feedback is always telling someone of their wrong-doing or bad things. A surprising finding also comes from managers in which case 50 percent said feedback is telling someone of their wrong-doing sometimes while another 50 percent said not necessarily telling someone of their bad or wrong doing. Figure 3 is a summary of these findings.

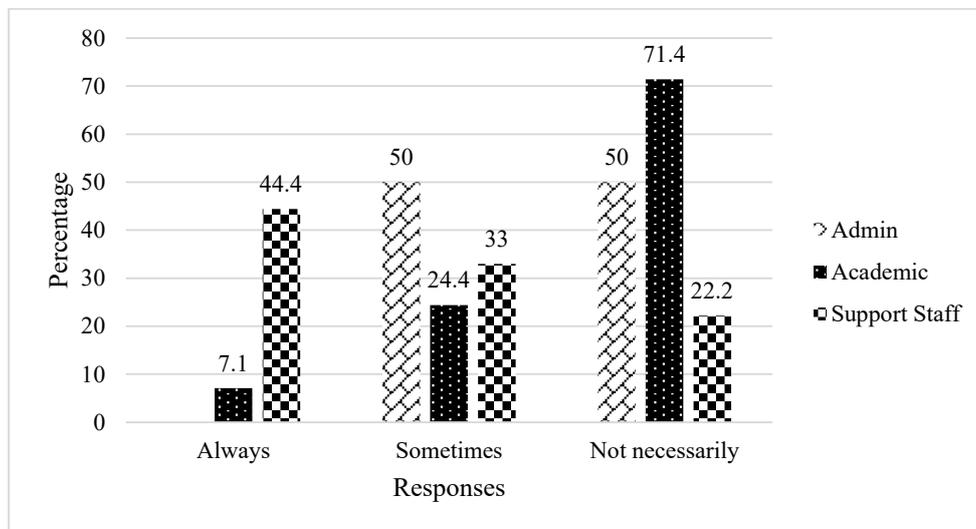


Figure 4: Is Feedback Telling someone of the Bad things or their Wrong doing?

4.5 Age, Qualification, and Experience of a person giving feedback!

In life, understanding of things including the environment around us is affected by our age, qualification, and experience on a particular aspect of life a person is dealing with. In order to ascertain if age, qualification, and experience also matter when giving and receiving feedback, a question was asked to respondents on this. In response, 75 percent of the managers said age, qualification and experience matters when giving and receiving feedback while 50 percent of the academic staff said it does not matter. Just 44.4 percent of the support staff indicated there was no issue about age, qualification and experience affecting feedback giving and receiving. This meant anyone can give feedback regardless of their age, qualification, and experience. Figure 4 gives a picture of the responses regarding the relationship between age, education, experience, and feedback on one side.

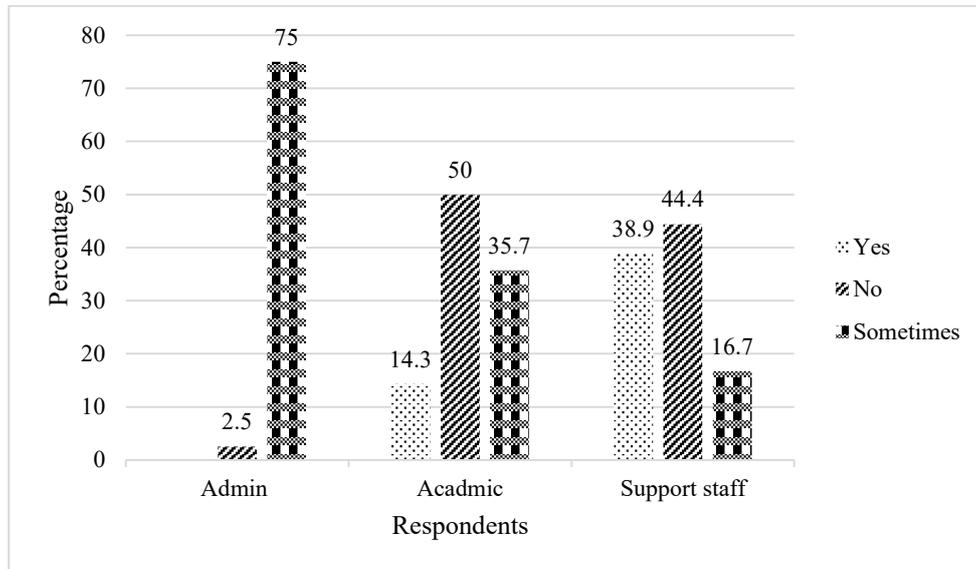


Figure 5: If Age, Education and Experience of Feedback giver is relevant

4.6 Do they care if you will use the feedback??

There seems to be more confusion regarding feedback. In some cases, feedback is interpreted to mean giving a response to a question. In other cases, it seems to mean correcting someone of their wrongs. For whatever meaning or interpretation attached to feedback, one important aspect is whether the feedback receiver will use the feedback given. A question was asked to determine if the givers of feedback are concerned as to whether the receiver of feedback will use the feedback. On overall, all the three groups (Administrative, academic, and support staff) said they cared if the receiver will use the feedback they have given. Academic staff cared at 85.7 percent Managers cared at 75 percent and Support staff cares at 61.1 percent. Figure 5 is a summary of the responses on whether the feedback givers cared if the receiver will use the feedback received.

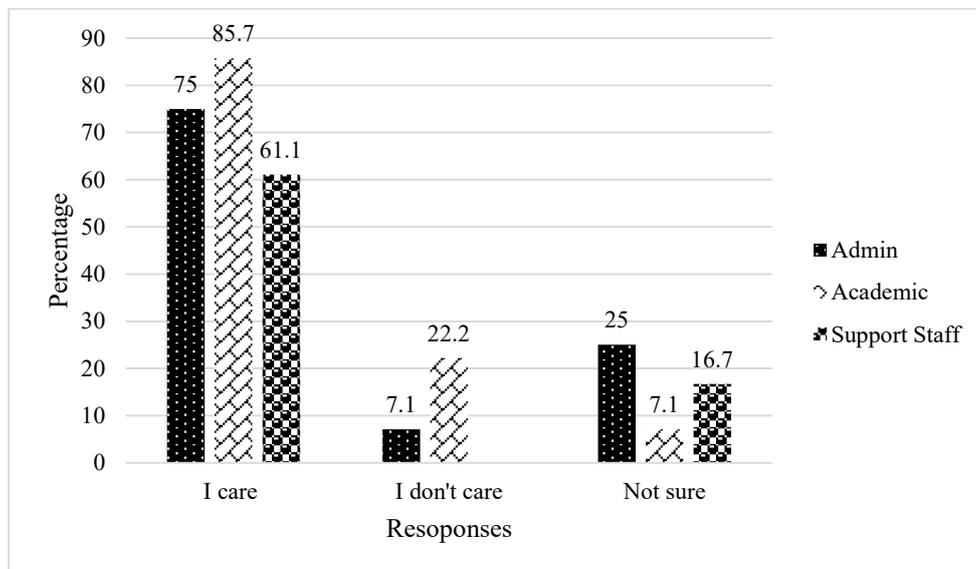


Figure 6: Feedback Givers Care if Feedback Receiver will use Feedback

4.7 Feedback enhances work-related performance

The essence of this whole study was to determine the relevance of feedback in terms of enhancing work-related performance. As pointed out, there seem to be more meanings of feedback and various understanding as to what feedback is all about. Literature has it that feedback is a process that assists an individual or a group of individuals where they are performing well and where they have to make improvements. Feedback is meant to enhance work-related performance. In line with this understanding, a question was asked to the respondents in this study to determine if feedback enhances work-related performance in individuals or groups of individuals. The responses were overwhelming because 100 percent of the Managers, 100 percent of the Academics and 77.8 percent of the Support staff said yes feedback enhances and individual or a group of individuals' work-related performance. Just a small number 11.1 percent of the Support staff said they were not sure and they do not agree that feedback enhances work-related performance. Figure 6 is a summary of these striking findings.

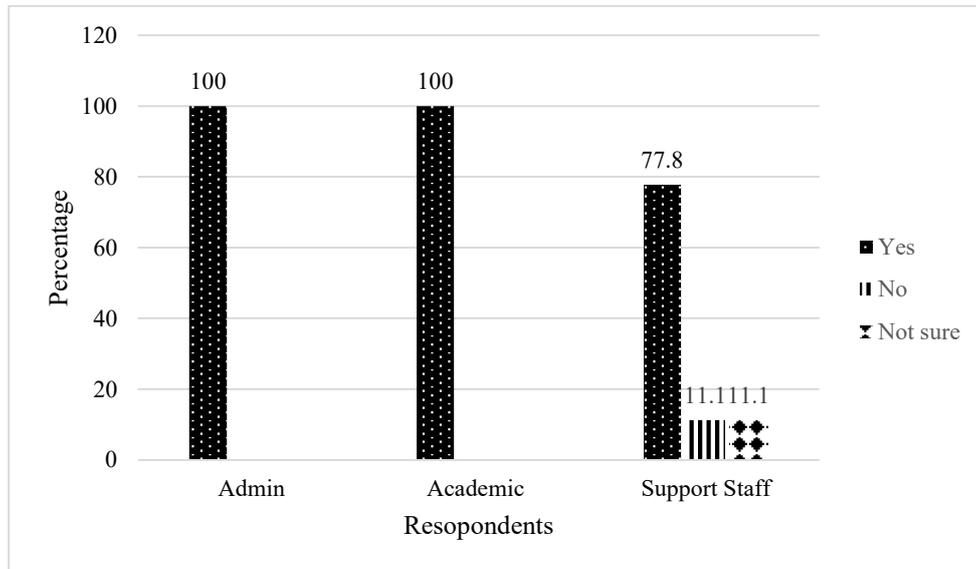


Figure 7: Feedback enhances Work-Related Performance

4.8 Some significant relationships within some variable

Descriptive analysis of the variables revealed some exciting trends which needed further analysis in order to understand further the issues pertaining to feedback giving/receiving and enhancing the work performance of an individual. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation analyses were performed on some specific variable with the 'feedback enhances work-related performance' variable.

Analysis of variance showed some significant differences between 'feedback enhances work related performance' variable and 'position of the respondent at work place' ($p = 0.044$), 'respondents preference to giving both verbal and non-verbal feedback' ($p = 0.004$), 'that respondent never cared whether the person receiving feedback will use it or not' ($p = 0.016$), 'it is the responsibility of the respondent to give feedback' ($p = 0.026$), 'that respondents wished to tell the recipients their bad things only' ($p = 0.001$) and 'that the respondents looked and age, qualification, and experience of feedback giver' ($p = 0.036$). The specific areas that showed significant differences are as highlighted in the pairwise comparison test shown in Table-1. The significant difference between the 'feedback enhances work-related performance' variable and other variables confer a deeper meaning in terms of

the perception as to whether feedback giving and receiving enhances an individual or group work-related performance. For example, only 11.1 percent of the support staff respondents said they do not know or they are not sure if feedback can enhance someone’s work-related performance. On the contrary, 77.8 percent of the same group said feedback can enhance work related performance. In such a case a significant difference from ANOVA is a strong backing for the result.

Table 1: Pairwise Comparison of Significant Variable to the Feedback Enhances Work-related Performance’ Variable

Variable	Test	Pair		Std Error	Sig (p-value)
Would like to tell people their bad things only every time you give them FB	Tukey HSD	Yes	No	0.506	0.017
		Yes	Not sure	0.506	0.017
		No	Yes	0.506	0.017
		Not Sure	Yes	0.506	0.017
	Scheffe	Yes	No	0.506	0.023
		Yes	Not sure	0.506	0.023
		No	Yes	0.506	0.023
		Not Sure	Yes	0.506	0.023
	LSD	Yes	No	0.506	0.006
		Yes	Not sure	0.506	0.006
		No	Yes	0.506	0.006
		Not Sure	Yes	0.506	0.006
	Boniferroni	Yes	No	0.506	0.019
		Yes	Not sure	0.506	0.019
		No	Yes	0.506	0.019
		Not Sure	Yes	0.506	0.019
Prefers to give both verbal and non-verbal feedback	Tukey HSD	Yes	No	0.422	0.010
		No	Yes	0.422	0.010
	Scheffe	Yes	No	0.422	0.014
		No	Yes	0.422	0.014
	LSD	Yes	No	0.422	0.004
		No	Yes	0.422	0.004

	Boniferroni	Yes	No	0.465	0.011
		No	Yes	0.465	0.011
You don't care whether the person will use the feedback given to them	Tukey HSD	Yes	Not sure	0.465	0.030
		Not Sure	Yes	0.465	0.030
	Scheffe	Yes	Not sure	0.465	0.039
		Not Sure	Yes	0.465	0.039
	LSD	Yes	Not sure	0.465	0.011
		Not Sure	Yes	0.465	0.011
	Boniferroni	Yes	Not sure	0.465	0.034
		Not Sure	Yes	0.465	0.034
Giving feedback is your responsibility	Tukey HSD	Yes	No	0.317	0.022
		No	Yes	0.317	0.022
	Skeffe	Yes	No	0.317	0.030
		No	Yes	0.317	0.030
	LSD	Yes	No	0.317	0.008
		No	Yes	0.317	0.008
			Not sure	0.317	0.027
		Not sure	No	0.317	0.027
	Boniferroni	Yes	No	0.317	0.025
	No	Yes	0.317	0.027	
Looks at age, qualification, and experience of person giving you feedback	LSD	Yes	No	0.508	0.023
		No	Yes	0.508	0.023

Note: All differences shown in the table above were significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The use of different statistical tests were just for comparison purposes. The benchmark test was LSD as stated in the methodology section

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study have shown that feedback is not correcting someone of their wrongs, which someone needs to prepare if they are to give effective feedback and that feedback is not necessarily telling someone of their wrongs. Further, the study has also revealed that feedback enhances an individual or a group of individuals' work-related performance.

In view of the findings in this study, it is recommended that:

1. Feedback culture is institutionalised in which case tailor-made trainings on feedback and performance-related topics need to be offered to employees at given intervals. Such topics as soft skills, time management, motivation, and many more.
2. There is a need to initiate dialogue and deliberate or periodical interactions between top managers and junior staff with an aim of kick-starting feedback culture. This would act as a platform for nurturing a feedback culture which can grow to specialised feedback giving and receiving among employees.
3. Initiate some motivational strategies that can encourage members of staff to give feedback to each other. For example, carry out individualised or personalised assessments on individuals so that they check themselves in terms of how much feedback they have given and received and if such feedback culture is assisting their work and overall life performance.
4. Lessons generated in this study can be applied to any growing university or institution that seeks to enhance the performance of its employees through a feedback culture.

6. Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Questionnaire
Research questionnaire: Feedback

Dear participant,

We are happy to engage you on some aspects of feedback with an aim of enhancing the performance of staff as part of performance management studies. The questionnaire that you are kindly requested to complete will help us complete a study titled "Performance enhancement among the faculty members of the University of Livingstonia through feedback giving and receiving." We would like to assure you that the information collected will not be used against you in any way. Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study.

Preliminary information

Date:

Administrative position Academic position Support staff
(Accounts/Security/Library/Grounds etc)

A. General understanding of feedback

1. Feedback is correcting somebody on their wrongs.
Yes No Not sure
2. Feedback can be given any time.
Yes No Not sure
3. Feedback can help enhance somebody's performance on a particular activity/task.
Yes No Not sure
4. One needs to prepare thoroughly before giving feedback to someone.
Yes No Not sure
5. Feedback must be clear, timely and not judgmental.
Always Sometimes Not necessarily

B. Giving feedback

6. You can give feedback to someone anywhere anytime.
Yes No Not sure
7. You would prefer to give both verbal and non-verbal feedback.
Yes No Don't know
8. It is good to prepare someone before giving them feedback.
Always Sometimes Not necessary

9. You don't care whether the person will use the feedback you have given them.
I care I don't care Not sure
10. Giving feedback is your responsibility.
Yes No Don't know
11. You would like to tell people their bad things only every time you give them feedback.
Always Sometimes Not necessarily
- C. Receiving feedback
12. Can ask someone to give you feedback on what you have done.
Always Sometimes Not necessary
13. Would like to answer back as someone is giving feedback to you.
Always Sometimes Not at all
14. Looks at the age, qualification and experience of the person giving you the feedback.
Yes No Sometimes

End of Questionnaire
Thank You for Your Responses