FindingPotential

Enhancing Personality Interpretation Through Feedback

www.greatwithtalent.com ▫ info@greatwithtalent.com ▫ +44 (0) 870 760 6598

Comprehensive Guide to Feedback

Feedback of the Personality Questionnaire (PQ) results should provide individuals with a greater insight into their own behaviour, and allow them to clarify and confirm the results obtained. A face to face discussion is the most appropriate approach for feedback, although there may be circumstances when this is not possible and using the telephone is more convenient.

Offering feedback can provide a number of specific benefits:

- Ownership of Results - Developing an understanding of their own profile can help to make people take more responsibility for developing themselves. In this sense, the feedback process becomes as important as the results themselves.
- Fairness - Understanding the data on which potential personnel decisions may be made will promote an atmosphere of fairness and reduce feelings of bias and prejudice.
- Public Relations - Behavioural questionnaires can sometimes appear rather opaque to the person involved. Feedback can debunk any such concerns and leave people feeling more positive both towards the technique and the organisation in general.
- Interpreter Development - Feedback can also help to develop your own interpretation skills.

In addition, it is important to note the following point:

- Legal - If PQ data has been stored on computer or on some other system, there is a legal requirement to give respondents meaningful feedback of scores upon request under the Data Protection Act (1998).

General Feedback Principles

Best Practice

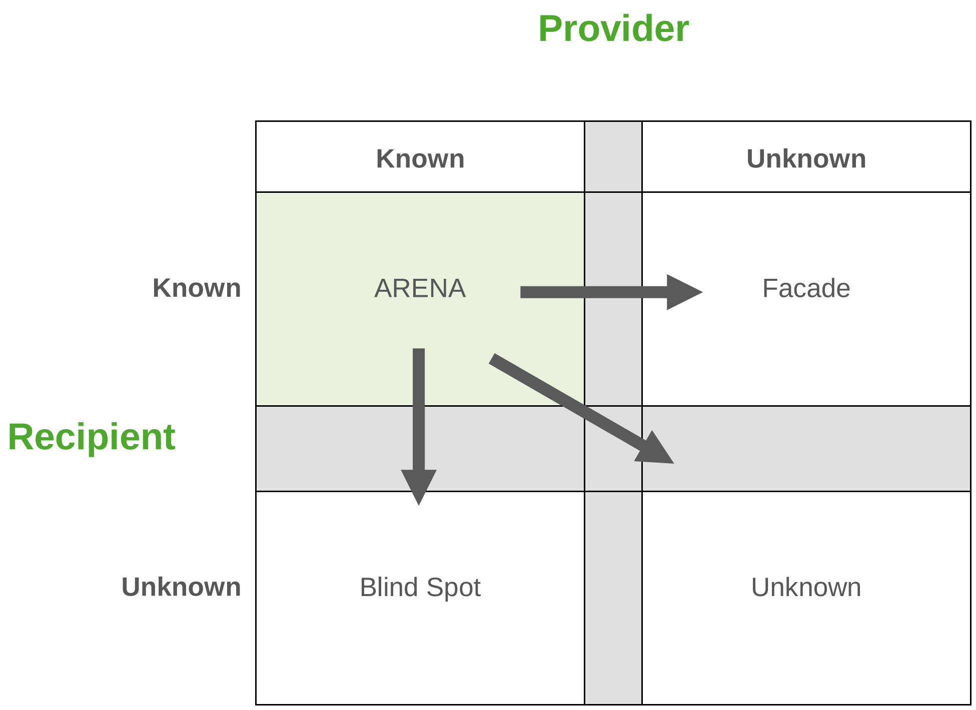
Feedback of the Personality Questionnaire should only be given by people who are properly trained in its use and interpretation. Feedback should generally take place as soon as possible after questionnaire completion and, ideally, on a separate and distinct occasion (unless the feedback is itself part of the process, for example, within a development centre). Time needs to be set aside specifically for the purpose of feedback and it should be as full and detailed as possible. At the same time, it needs to be managed with tact and sensitivity. Confidentiality should be assured and adhered to.

Most people have areas of vulnerability and yet many people will be ready to accept apparently new personal information about themselves. This places a real responsibility upon the person giving the feedback. That is, they should treat the person with due respect, be aware of their own limitations, restrict the use of the questionnaire only to applications for which it was intended, and never “go beyond the data” unless supported by additional evidence.

It is also important to consider the issue of feedback to relevant third parties, such as the individual's own line manager. In this instance, line manager feedback could well take the form of a short written report. This would typically combine information from the profile, together with any information gathered from feedback.

The "Johari Window"

Effective feedback involves a two way process of information exchange and subsequent exploration. This is neatly captured by the concept of the "Johari window", where the two people involved in the feedback (the Provider and the Recipient) try to uncover information that is unknown to them. The purpose, in effect, is to expand the area of the Arena, in particular to what both know about the Recipient.



Preparing to Give the Feedback

Adequate preparation is an essential prerequisite of a good feedback discussion. The person giving the feedback should have a thorough understanding of both the instrument itself and the particular results concerned, and should be able to describe the latter in simple, jargon-free terms.
To these ends, it is important to:

- Fully understand the meanings of the scales of the questionnaire, together with what the scores mean. This should be supplemented by identifying real examples of such behaviours taken from the workplace.
- Allow adequate time to prepare for the feedback discussion, including the preparation of questions to ask.
- Book sufficient time for the feedback discussion itself. It is suggested that you allow about 30 minutes of time for face to face PQ feedback. Obviously more time will be needed if you want to combine an in-depth development or coaching discussion with the questionnaire feedback.
- Ensure privacy and freedom from interruptions. This is crucial if a really open discussion is to be achieved.

General Feedback Skills

The importance of building rapport. Taking steps to build rapport during the feedback session greatly enhances the effectiveness of the session and the impact of the results. If the recipient gets the sense of "being on the same wavelength" as the giver of feedback, they are much more likely to accept the results. Also, the degree of honesty and openness attained during the session will be heightened thus encouraging the recipient to take more positive action in developing him or herself.

There are certain general feedback skills that can be applied to facilitate a positive feedback process:

- **Attention.** It is important not only to be attentive to what the recipient is saying and doing, but also to **convey** this fact. Listen to what the person is saying. Show that you have been paying attention by picking up on leads, asking appropriate follow-up questions and re-stating or reflecting back on what has been said. Note that attention is also conveyed by a number of non-verbal behaviours: for example, eye contact, open posture, nodding and smiling when appropriate.
- **Develop empathy** with how the feedback process is being experienced by the recipient and communicate this to them. The person needs to feel that they are being understood and not judged. The verbal and non-verbal signs of attention noted above will facilitate this process.

- **Encourage the expression of individual feelings and opinions** about the circumstances prior to the completion of the questionnaire, the experience of taking the questionnaire, and the implications arising from the results. The more that recipients can take an active part in the discussion of the data, the more they will be able to bring in additional information, develop new insights and incorporate the data into their own, hopefully changing, view of themselves.
- **The proportion of talking time should preferably favour the person whose profile it is**. Both the amount and quality of information elicited are likely to be influenced by the questioning style adopted.

  Questions should be:
    - Short / succinct
    - Open
    - Probing
    - Single / one at a time.

  Avoid questions that are:
    - Leading
    - Closed (except to get specific clarification)
    - Hypothetical
    - Multiple
    - Over-elaborate.

Be objective. Don't confuse how you might feel about the profile if it were yours with how the recipient is feeling. Each person's attitudes are unique. Be alert to your feelings about the person lest these inadvertently lead you to bias your description of the results. **Avoid making overt judgements about the individual concerned**.

Be sensitive to the needs, feelings and aspirations likely to be aroused in the recipient. You can expect any of a whole range of reactions from someone who may be rejecting the results outright, to someone struggling to recognise himself or herself in the profile, to someone actively going through the process of developing a more realistic self-image.

Be specific in your interpretations. Don't engage in generalisations or offer bland statements with little practical worth.

Have the courage to help the person confront the data contained in the profile and the overall picture that is emerging. Avoiding what may appear to be a potentially sensitive or "problem" area is likely to be unhelpful to the person in the long run. The defence “I didn’t want to hurt him/her” often means that the person giving feedback lacks self-confidence in dealing with possible negative reactions.

Be open. There are strong arguments for using the profile chart openly, and placing it on the table between you and the recipient. This encourages co-operation and reinforces the idea of mutual involvement and “working together”. The graphic design of the profile chart also makes it easy to absorb the information, especially if accompanied by a clear, jargon-free interpretation.

You may possibly want to start by firstly showing a blank or sample profile so that the recipient gets a feel for what the questionnaire does or does not measure. This will also prevent the recipient from becoming overwhelmed when they see their own results for the first time. It may in fact be useful to mask some sections of the profile from the outset, or to only reveal the results section by section. Additionally it might be worth discussing a part of the profile first before actually revealing the results. Whichever approach is adopted, it is important that the recipient should be able to view the profile in its entirety at some stage.

Interpretation and Feedback of the PQ

When feeding back the Personality Questionnaire, some reactions to feedback can be specifically predicted from the profile itself. In particular one needs to pay attention to the score obtained on the Social Desirability scale as this may well set the tone for the rest of the feedback. In general terms, the feedback of a PQ profile should proceed as follows:

PQ Feedback Sequence

1. Preparation
2. Introduction
3. Feeding Back Individual Scales
4. Linking Scales
5. Summary
6. Implications

General Comments about PQ scores

The scores shown on a PQ profile chart should not to be considered as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Note, however, that some kinds of style or behaviour can make a particularly positive or negative contribution to a job depending on the job itself. It is often the appropriateness or inappropriateness of particular styles and behaviours to particular situations that can be most telling.

Interpreting the scales on the 1 to 10 neutral mid-point system

When feeding back results from the PQ profile, you may want to adopt verbal equivalents for the 1 to 10 scores and then apply these consistently. The list below gives some suggestions for such descriptions. Remember that because the PQ has effectively bi-polar (or double-ended) scales, you may need to think carefully about which end of the scale you want to emphasise for a particular individual.

Descriptions for the Questionnaire scores

Score	Relative to the left hand scale	Relative to the right hand scale
1	Extremely, particularly, especially, unusually.	Hardly ever, rarely, barely, strong aversion to.
2	Very strong tendency for, habitually, really.	Very strong dislike, habitually shies away from, very much avoids.
3	Strong tendency, definitely, markedly, noticeable preference for, typically.	Strong dislike for, typically avoid, unlikely to.
4	Tendency towards, a little more, relative preference for, quite often.	Tendency away from, sometimes avoids, a little less, relative dislike for, avoids.
5/6	Moderately, neither one extreme nor the other, a balance between.	Moderately, neither one extreme nor the other, a balance between.
7	Tendency away from, sometimes avoids, a little less, relative dislike for, avoids.	Tendency towards, a little more, relative preference for, quite often.
8	Strong dislike for, typically avoid, unlikely to.	Strong tendency, definitely, markedly, noticeable preference for, typically.
9	Very strong dislike, habitually shies away from, very much avoids.	Very strong tendency for, habitually, really.
10	Hardly ever, rarely, barely, strong aversion to.	Extremely, particularly, especially, unusually.

Dealing with low/high Social Desirability scores

The Social Desirability scale on the PQ indicates the extent to which recipients have answered questions in an unduly harsh or un-self critical way. This in turn may lead to under-estimates on some scales (Low Social Desirability) or over-estimates on some scales (High Social Desirability).

When dealing with a low/high Social Desirability score, even greater emphasis must be placed on having a two-way discussion and collecting quality evidence which confirms or challenges the scores obtained on particular scales. It might be useful to start in areas where the scores are not too low or high, and then move onto those areas where the scores are particularly low or high. At all times, the focus needs to remain on having an objective and evidence-based discussion.

Conducting a Feedback Session

Introduction

The introduction to the feedback session plays a major role in facilitating the process. It needs to cover a number of areas:

The Purpose

It is important to discuss with the person why the questionnaire was completed and what the objectives of the feedback discussion are. This is the time to highlight how the results will be used, making sure that you both agree on the agenda, and are both realistic about expectations. The questionnaire can only go so far in addressing work and performance issues.

Two-way Discussion

The emphasis of the feedback discussion should be on a **2-way process of information sharing**. The intention is that through a frank, open discussion and exploration, both the person giving the feedback and the recipient of that feedback can uncover information previously unknown to one or other or to both of them.

Boundaries of the Discussion

- The degree of confidentiality for the discussion needs to be agreed.
- Discussion needs to take place on whether notes are to be taken and if so, what will happen to them afterwards.

- The time available for the discussion needs to be agreed. If appropriate, discuss whether this time can be extended at this session or whether a further meeting needs to be arranged for some future date.

Description of the Questionnaire

Remind the recipient, briefly, of the characteristics of the questionnaire completed.

- that it is a self-report questionnaire.
- that it is not infallible, but whose strength depends on the frankness and honesty with which the questions have been answered.
- that the PQ reflects style, behaviour and approach, but not ability.
- that style, behaviour and approach are not necessarily good or bad, but more or less appropriate depending upon work circumstances.
- that the PQ consists of 15 dimensions grouped into 5 main sections (and explain what these are).

Discussion of Circumstances

Discuss with the recipient:

- His/her current work circumstances to identify the context of any likely discussion.
- His/her feelings on being asked to complete the questionnaire.
- How and when it was administered.
- His/her perceptions of responding to the questionnaire.
- Whether any recent or current events are likely to have affected the responses unduly.

Feeding Back Individual Scales

It is usually most effective to start from the top of the profile, taking the scales one by one and gradually building up the profile section by section. This approach is obviously systematic and means that you won't miss particular scales. Often, however, the recipient, in response to information about one scale, could provide evidence that leads you to jump ahead to another scale. This approach is in many ways more natural and spontaneous, but you will need to balance this more free-flowing style with the benefits of sticking to a more logical and systematic approach.

Another approach to feeding back the scales is to feed back those scales which are relevant to **specific job requirements** (or competencies). In this way, the feedback discussion becomes more like a competency (or criterion-based) interview. By focusing on the most relevant scales in this way, the person providing the feedback can make the most efficient use of limited time.

To increase the variety of approach, the person providing the feedback may want to describe a scale first and then ask for the recipient's view or opinion of their score on that scale. Later the person providing the feedback can then disclose the actual score or rating achieved. Varying the style may better hold someone’s interest and encourage them to make their own contributions.

Linking Scales

Linking of scales can take feedback onto a more challenging yet rewarding path. Linking can relate to two aspects; linking scale scores with actual work behaviour, and linking the scores of some scales with the scores on other scales.

In addressing either of these aspects, it may be worth asking more about the recipient's current work role and experiences. Explore situations or events relevant to the scale or scales being discussed. Use open questions and ask for examples that link the Questionnaire scores to work-related events or incidents. In this way, you can explore the particular meaning of a score for the recipient and how it ties in with his or her own self-perceptions. Remember also to probe for information that might challenge a score as well as that which supports it. This will help to validate the accuracy of the profile and highlight areas that might need further interpretation.

In trying to link scales, you can try to combine the scale scores within any one section or link scores across sections. By using both ‘within-section’ and ‘across-section’ links, a fairly comprehensive picture can be built up. As before, this can often most easily be done by discussing actual events and behaviours in the work place.

Summary

It is useful to summarise at intervals the major themes emerging from the profile. Summarising in this way serves the combined function of reinforcing the feedback structure yet allowing you to check and clarify your understanding of the data.

At the end of the discussion, it is useful to summarise the main points arising from the questionnaire as a whole and to get the recipient's buy-in to the results. Ask them to say what they think they have learnt, what surprises, if any, they had, what they agreed with and what they disagreed with. Get them to summarise their own view of their behaviour and style.

Implications

Once a full and, hopefully, agreed picture of style and behaviour has emerged, it is necessary to use this to address the original purpose of completing the questionnaire, e.g. to help someone identify some training needs, to put together some development plans etc.

However, before agreeing specifics, it is worth considering any general implications arising for the individual's future behaviour and choice. Try to be non-evaluative and discuss what might happen rather than what should happen. It is essential to remember that the profile is a sample of the ‘here and now’ and cannot be taken as totally infallible or constant for all time. In general terms, PQ data should be regarded as having a limited shelf life, say a period of 12-18 months. Completion of the questionnaire may be needed again after this time, particularly if some major change has taken place at work or some important decision is being considered on the basis of this data. Remember also, however, that in many instances people will not be literally able to “change” their behaviour or style. Rather it may be more a matter of managing their preferred or typical responses to various aspects of their work.

Finally these discussions then need to be translated into goal setting activities and the formulation of action plans, specifying who should do what, how and by when.

Particular Issues Relating to Development

In many ways the most important result arising from a PQ feedback is the formulation of a personal action plan based on the individual’s heightened awareness of his/her own behaviour. This should be guided primarily by areas that have been highlighted as possible **development needs** for the current job. However, the feedback is also an opportunity to consolidate **key strengths**, to explore areas as yet **undeveloped** and even to identify ways of including **unused potential** into the scope of the current job role.

Inherent in this process is the identification of those behaviours especially important in the job and those of lesser significance. This is a process that should ideally be carried out in advance by both the recipient and their line manager working together, with any differences in opinion discussed openly. This is useful as it can help interpret the importance of low scores on particular scales. Low scores in areas of lesser significance for the job should be given lower priority.

The individual should be encouraged to evaluate whether or not developmental activities such as training/shadowing/mentoring/coaching, or deliberate changes in personal style, should be considered.

Wherever possible, action plans should be recorded and copies of these held by both parties. Future appointments that regularly follow up on individual progress are likely to increase commitment to the action plan. At a later date, it might become important to retake the questionnaire in order to monitor particular developments/changes for the individual.