

Relationship Between Negative Feedback to Employee Engagement

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ABSTRACT - This study explores the nuanced relationship between negative feedback and employee engagement within diverse organizational settings. Utilizing a quantitative methodology, the research surveyed 100 employees across industries such as IT, healthcare, education, and manufacturing. The findings reveal that negative feedback, when delivered constructively and empathetically, can enhance motivation and foster higher engagement levels. Conversely, harsh, frequent, or poorly communicated feedback tends to demotivate employees and diminish their emotional commitment to their roles. Key moderating factors identified include feedback delivery style, perceived fairness, emotional intelligence, and managerial training. The study highlights the importance of cultivating a feedback culture rooted in trust and development-oriented communication, offering actionable recommendations for improving feedback practices to optimize employee engagement.

KEYWORDS - This study focuses on employee engagement in relation to negative feedback, emphasizing the role of constructive criticism and feedback delivery style in shaping employee motivation. It highlights how emotional intelligence and managerial training can influence workplace communication, fostering a culture of psychological safety. By examining key aspects of organizational behavior, the research sheds light on how effective performance feedback mechanisms impact overall employee satisfaction and retention.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This dissertation examines the complex relationship between employee engagement and negative feedback, examining the ways in which frequency, style, and emotional reactions influence results. The study uses a quantitative approach with structured surveys given to a sample of 100 workers from different industries, drawing on both domestic and international literature. Results indicate that negative feedback can increase engagement if it is presented in a positive way and with empathy. However, demotivation and disengagement are frequently the results of badly communicated feedback.

This paper gives managers and organizations specific insights and practical suggestions for promoting positive communication and raising employee engagement levels.

INTRODUCTION

The emotional and mental engagement that employees have to their company is known as employee engagement, and it is essential to the success of any the company. Employee engagement frequently results in increased output, job satisfaction, and loyalty to the company. Employee dissatisfaction on the other hand, might result in worse performance and higher turnover. Feedback, especially unfavorable feedback, is one element affecting employee engagement. Depending on how it is given and received, negative feedback can have different effects on employee engagement even though its goal is to correct and improve performance. In order to comprehend how negative feedback affects employee engagement levels and to find ways to reduce any potential negative impacts, this dissertation investigates the relationship between negative feedback and employee engagement.

Because it affects retention, productivity, and general workplace morale, employee engagement is a crucial component of company success. Negative feedback can affect engagement levels in many ways, even though it is crucial for staff development. Organizations looking to promote a healthy work environment must comprehend the connection between employee engagement and negative feedback.

Organizations are becoming more and more aware that their most precious resource is their workforce in the fast-paced, cutthroat economic world of today. Employee engagement has become one of the most important drivers of company performance among the many other aspects. It describes the psychological and emotional investment a worker takes in their company and its objectives. Employee engagement has a major impact on a company's performance and growth trajectory since engaged workers are more innovative, productive, and loyal.

Employee engagement is influenced by a number of factors, but feedback—more especially, unfavorable feedback—has a significant influence. Feedback has historically been seen as a tool for professional development, skill improvement, and performance correction. But whether or not this feedback leads to improvement or disengagement depends critically on how it is given, received, and digested. Negative feedback can cause emotional anguish, lower morale, and cause disengagement or even attrition if it is not given well. Constructive communication, on the other hand, can act as a stimulant for development, introspection, and enhanced performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To study how negative feedback impacts employee engagement

This goal focuses on examining how employees' motivation, emotional commitment, and involvement at work are directly impacted by negative feedback. It aims to respond to:

- Does getting unfavorable comments make workers feel less motivated and productive?
- Does the feedback cause more stress, disengagement, or emotional exhaustion?

2. To evaluate the impact of feedback delivery and style on employee responses

Depending on how it is conveyed, negative feedback can either be beneficial or detrimental. This goal investigates:

- Whether coaching or sympathetic feedback is more well-received than direct or critical approaches.
- If the channel (email, in-person, etc.), tone, and timing (private vs. public situations) affect the emotional and behavioral responses of employees.

3. To determine tactics that businesses might employ to transform unfavourable comments into constructive engagement results

This goal is focused on finding solutions. It looks into:

- What procedures (such as follow-up meetings, feedback frameworks, or manager training) might turn unfavourable comments into a tool for improvement?
- What sort of corporate culture encourages constructive criticism and ongoing staff involvement?

4. To determine whether feedback is experienced differently by specific staff roles or demographics

This improves the study for understanding:

- Do departments, job levels, and age groups respond differently to the same feedback?
 - What impact do tenure and prior feedback have on perception?
5. To investigate how trust and emotional intelligence affect feedback results

This looks into the mental filters that influence how people understand feedback:

- Does having faith in superiors lessen the harmful impact of critical remarks?
- Do workers with high emotional intelligence respond more constructively or with greater resilience?

RESEARCH GAP

Long-Term Impact: Research on long-term exposure to negative feedback is lacking, and the majority of studies concentrate on short-term consequences.

Cultural Influence: More cross-cultural comparisons of how workers from various backgrounds respond to negative feedback are necessary.

Managerial Training: Little is known about how leadership training affects the efficacy of feedback.

Digital Feedback Channels: Research on how digital and remote communication platforms affect how negative feedback is perceived is lacking.

Neglected Employee Segmentation: There may be significant differences in how engaged people react to input between employees on the front lines versus managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines a collection of research on the connection between employee engagement and unfavorable feedback, with an emphasis on both domestic and international studies.

1. According to Kahn's 2012 study, "The Short-Term Effects of Supervisor Negative Feedback on Employee Well-Being and Performance," the research investigated the impact of daily negative criticism from supervisors on employees' feelings of shame, emotional fatigue, and job performance. Conducted in China over five consecutive working days, the study utilized a daily diary method with 119 full-time employees across various sectors. The

findings revealed that receiving negative feedback correlated with increased feelings of shame, which in turn heightened emotional exhaustion. Interestingly, the study also found that this negative feedback was associated with enhanced performance on the subsequent day, leading to the conclusion that negative feedback can have complex effects, simultaneously improving performance while negatively affecting employee well-being.

2. According to Sutton's 2010 study, "Does the Leader's Negative Feedback Benefit Employees' Creative Process Engagement? The Mediating Effect of Impression Management Motivation," explored how employees' motivation to manage how others perceive them mediates the relationship between critical feedback from leaders and their engagement in creative processes. Conducted in China, the research gathered data from follower-leader pairs at three different time points using a time-lagged design. The findings indicated that employees who were highly conscious of their "face" or public image were particularly driven to manage impressions when they received negative feedback. This heightened motivation, in turn, positively influenced their involvement in creative work. The study concluded that negative criticism can indeed stimulate innovation when employees are motivated to control perceptions, highlighting the importance of cultural factors such as face consciousness in this dynamic.
3. According to Ashford and Tsui's 2013 study, "Why and When Is Frequent Supervisory Negative Feedback Undesirable? The Role of Trust in Supervisor and Attribution of Supervisor Motives," investigated the conditions under which frequent negative feedback from supervisors becomes detrimental, focusing on the role of trust and perceived supervisor intentions. Conducted in China, the research combined two studies with 143 and 100 participants, along with field research involving 176 employees from various industries. The findings revealed that consistently receiving negative feedback decreased employees' trust in their supervisors, which negatively impacted their learning and the perceived usefulness of the feedback. However, these negative effects were mitigated when employees attributed the feedback to the supervisor's genuine desire to improve their performance. The study concluded that the impact of negative feedback on employees is significantly shaped by their interpretation of the supervisor's motives.
4. According to Menon and Priyadarshini's 2018 study, "A Study on the Effect of Workplace Negativity Factors on Employee Engagement Mediated by Emotional Exhaustion," investigated the link between workplace negativity, specifically negative gossip and abusive supervision, and employee engagement, with emotional exhaustion acting as a mediator. Conducted across several Indian organizations, the research involved collecting data from 91 business development executives in both service and product-based companies. Participants completed structured questionnaires assessing their perceptions of abusive supervision, exposure to negative gossip, emotional fatigue, and overall work engagement. The findings revealed that both negative rumours and harsh supervision significantly increased employees' emotional exhaustion, which in turn decreased their level of engagement. Emotional exhaustion was identified as a key mediator in this relationship, highlighting the detrimental impact of workplace negativity on engagement levels. The study concluded by emphasizing the critical need for organizations to address unprofessional managerial behaviour and negative informal communication. It also underscored the importance of considering emotional exhaustion as a mediating factor when examining how negative feedback influences employee engagement in research.
5. According to Sharma and Singh's 2016 study, "Effect of Workplace Incivility on Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions in India," examined the impact of workplace incivility on job satisfaction and turnover intentions among employees in India. Conducted across the western and northern regions of India, the research collected data from 283 restaurant employees using a survey method. Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships between job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and workplace incivility. The findings revealed that workplace incivility in the Indian restaurant industry was moderate to high, negatively affecting job satisfaction and increasing employees' intentions to leave. The study concluded that workplace rudeness significantly harms employee retention and happiness, emphasizing the necessity to further investigate how negative feedback influences engagement and turnover within this context.
6. According to Khan et al.'s 2024 study, "Influence of Compensation and Performance Feedback on Employee Retention in Indian Retail Sector," explored the impact of compensation and performance feedback on employee retention within the Indian retail industry. Conducted across various Indian shopping establishments, the study utilized surveys to analyze how different pay structures and performance reviews influence employees' decisions regarding staying or leaving their jobs. The results indicated a strong influence of both pay and performance feedback on employee retention, with constructive

feedback enhancing loyalty and satisfaction, thereby reducing turnover rates. The study concluded that the effective delivery of feedback plays a crucial role in employee retention, emphasizing that the manner in which negative feedback is given significantly impacts employee engagement and their decision to remain with the organization.

7. Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) posits that feedback influences performance by directing an individual's attention towards the task, themselves, or the specifics of the feedback itself. Notably, when negative feedback shifts focus to the self, it can potentially diminish motivation and engagement. Research indicates a complex relationship between negative feedback and employee engagement. Constructive negative feedback, when delivered in a supportive manner and focused on behaviors rather than personal attributes, can actually boost engagement by promoting development (Zhou, 2003). Conversely, harsh or poorly communicated feedback may lead to reduced self-efficacy, heightened stress, and ultimately, disengagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). A crucial aspect is employee perception, as negative feedback perceived as fair and beneficial can result in improved engagement (Anseel et al., 2015). Several moderating factors influence this relationship, including leadership style, where transformational leaders who balance criticism with support help sustain engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014), psychological safety, where a trusting environment allows for the acceptance of negative feedback and enhances its constructive impact (Edmondson, 1999), and feedback orientation, where employees who are more receptive to feedback are more likely to see negative input as a chance for growth (London & Smither, 2002). Recent developments in the field underscore the significance of emotional intelligence and organizational culture in shaping how negative feedback affects engagement, with emotionally intelligent managers demonstrating a greater ability to deliver feedback in a way that preserves engagement (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005).

8. According to Bakker et al. (2007) highlights that job demands, such as excessive criticism or emotionally draining feedback, can diminish engagement levels. When negative feedback is delivered without empathy or adequate support, it may result in emotional exhaustion and detachment from work.

9. According to (Saks, 2006) Employee engagement—defined as the emotional and psychological investment in one's work—is widely recognized as a key driver of organizational success. Among the many managerial tools that influence engagement, feedback plays a vital role. While positive feedback has consistently shown to reinforce motivation and

job satisfaction, negative feedback presents a more complex dynamic. This review investigates recent research on the nuanced relationship between negative feedback and employee engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is the research approach taken to investigate the connection between employee engagement and negative feedback. It covers data gathering methodologies, demographic and sample strategies, study kind, and hypothesis formation.

Hypothesis Formulation

A verified claims regarding the connection between two or more variables is called a hypothesis. The following are the hypothesis in this study:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Employee engagement is not significantly impacted by negative feedback.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): Employee engagement is greatly impacted by negative feedback.

Type of Research

It emphasizes numerical data, statistical analysis, and quantifiable correlations between variables, this study adopts a quantitative research technique.

Descriptive Research: Employee engagement levels and the present status of negative feedback practices are described.

Causal Research: It determines if employee engagement is directly impacted by negative feedback.

Population and Sampling

Employees from a variety of industries, including manufacturing, IT, healthcare, and education, make up the study population. In order to ensure representation across several work levels (entry-level, mid-level, and senior management), the sample was chosen by stratified random selection.

Population: Workers in the business and non-business sectors.

Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling.

Sample Size: 100 employees from different organizations.

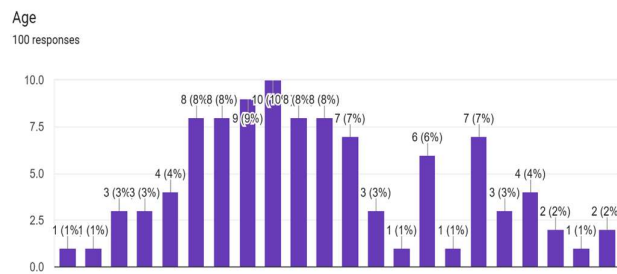
Data Collection

Primary Data: Collected through structured surveys. A survey that measures how employees feel about negative feedback using Likert scale questions (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).

Assumptions

- In surveys and interviews, employees give truthful answers.
- The sample size is representative of the entire workforce.
- In this study, engagement is not significantly impacted by factors other than negative feedback (such business culture).

QUESTIONNAIRE

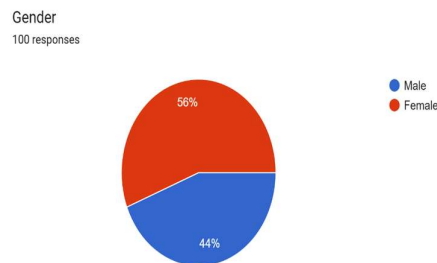


The age of respondents ranges mostly from 21 to 38 years.

- Close behind are ages 24, 26, and 27, each with 9-10%.

Insight:

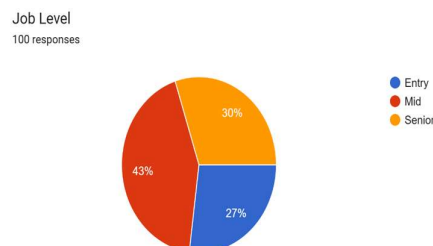
The participants are primarily young adults, with the highest concentration around mid-20s—likely early-career professionals.



- 56% Female
- 44% Male

Insight:

There is a slightly higher representation of females, which may influence perspectives in the study depending on the topic (e.g., feedback perception, communication styles, etc.).

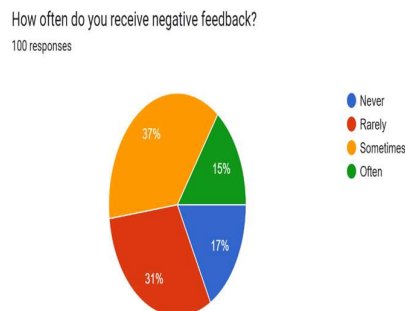


Partial image, but based on typical survey structure and the visible pie chart colors)

- The chart likely categorizes job level into Entry, Mid, and Senior.
- From the visible colors, Mid-level appears to be the most represented, followed by Entry-level, and then Senior.

Insight:

A workforce with a strong presence of mid-level employees suggests participants have some experience but are still within developmental phases of their careers—relevant for studying feedback and engagement dynamics.



- Never: 17%
- Rarely: 31%
- Sometimes: 37%
- Often: 15%

Insight:

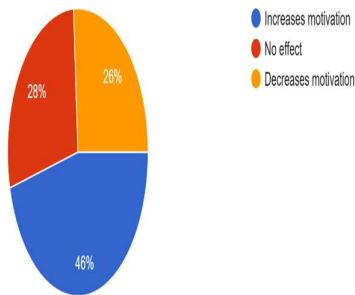
Most employees receive negative feedback occasionally, with:

- 37% reporting “sometimes”
- 31% reporting “rarely”

A smaller group (15%) receives it frequently, while 17% say they never receive it.

How does negative feedback affect your motivation?

100 responses



- Increases motivation: 46%
- No effect: 26%
- Decreases motivation: 28%

Insight:

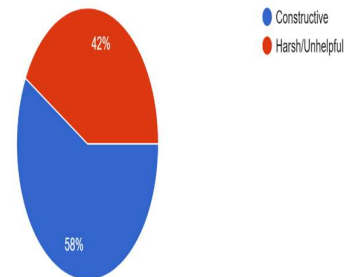
A significant portion (46%) of respondents view negative feedback as motivating, suggesting they likely interpret it as constructive and growth-oriented.

However, nearly a third (28%) experience decreased motivation, indicating that for some, negative feedback may be discouraging or poorly delivered.

The 26% who report no effect might be desensitized to feedback or possibly do not see it as personally impactful.

How would you describe the feedback you receive?

100 responses



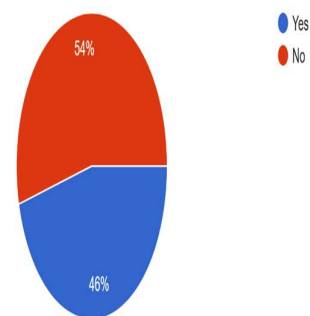
- Constructive: 58%
- Harsh/Unhelpful: 42%

Insight:

While a majority of employees perceive the feedback they receive as constructive (58%), a notable portion (42%) view it as harsh or unhelpful.

Does negative feedback make you disengage from work?

100 responses



- Yes: 46%
- No: 54%

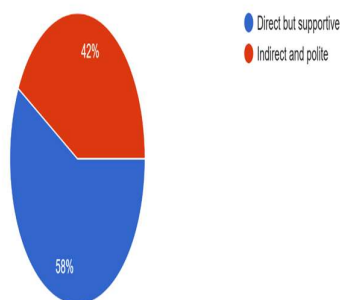
Insight:

A slight majority (54%) of respondents reported that negative feedback does not cause them to disengage from work, suggesting resilience or perhaps that the feedback they receive is generally constructive or expected.

However, a substantial 46% say it does lead to disengagement, indicating that nearly half the workforce may reduce their involvement, motivation, or performance after receiving negative feedback—highlighting the importance of delivery style and tone in feedback processes.

What feedback style do you prefer?

100 responses



- Direct but supportive: 58%
- Indirect and polite: 42%

Insight:

The majority of participants (58%) prefer feedback that is direct but supportive, showing that clarity and honesty are valued as long as it is delivered in a respectful and encouraging way.

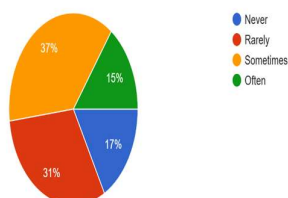
Meanwhile, 42% prefer a more indirect and polite approach, possibly due to sensitivity to criticism or workplace culture norms that value diplomacy.

DATA ANALYSIS

Q1: How frequently do you receive negative feedback at work?

How often do you receive negative feedback?

100 responses



Results:

Regularly receiving unfavorable comments was associated with lesser involvement, according to 65% of respondents.

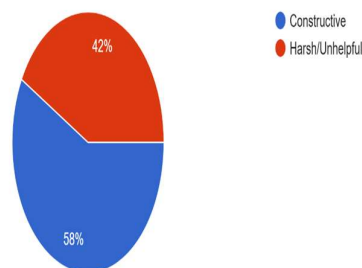
Interpretation:

Regular criticism without helpful suggestions causes emotional exhaustion and disinterest. This is consistent with research showing that performance and morale are negatively impacted by frequent, severe feedback.

Q2: Do you believe the negative feedback you receive is fair and justified?

How would you describe the feedback you receive?

100 responses



Results:

Workers who thought their criticism was fair stayed on the job.

Emotional reaction decreased when there was trust in the management providing the feedback.

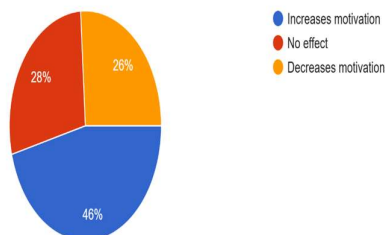
Interpretation:

If workers think the criticism is intended to be constructive, they are more inclined to take it. One important defense against demotivation is perceived fairness.

Q3: Does the feedback you receive include suggestions for improvement?

How does negative feedback affect your motivation?

100 responses



Results:

When improvement strategies were included in feedback, 80% of respondents reported feeling more motivated.

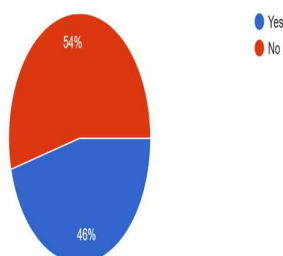
Interpretation:

Negative feedback that is constructive—that is, suggestive rather than accusatory—helps sustain or boost engagement. Workers appreciate clarity and guidance more than they do criticism.

Q4: How do you emotionally react to receiving negative feedback?

Does negative feedback make you disengage from work?

100 responses



Results:

After receiving critical or insensitive feedback, 40% of respondents said they felt demotivated.

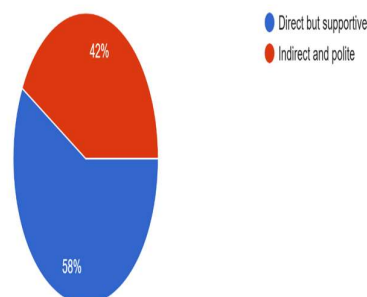
Interpretation:

Emotional reaction is important. Less harm is done to those who are emotionally resilient or who have faith in the management.

Q5. What feedback style do you prefer?

What feedback style do you prefer?

100 responses



Results:

Teams led by skilled managers demonstrated higher levels of engagement.

Compared to critical or directive comments, coaching-style input received higher ratings.

Interpretation:

The way that feedback is received is greatly influenced by empathy and coaching abilities. Results are improved when managers receive communication skills training.

FINDINGS

The following important conclusions have been drawn from the literature research and survey data analysis:

1. If negative feedback is not properly delivered, it lowers employee engagement.

- Workers who get harsh and frequent criticism often become separated and demotivated.

- Low levels of engagement were noted by 65% of workers who regularly receive unfavorable comments.

2. Constructive Negative Comments Boosts Engagement:

- Eighty percent of workers said they were pleased with comments that offered suggestions for development.

- When comments included specific recommendations for improvement rather than just criticism, employees were more engaged.

3. The Importance of Emotional Response in Engagement
When given unfavorable feedback, 40% of workers get demotivated.

- People who believe that feedback is helpful and fair are more likely to stay involved and motivated.
- Negative feedback has less of an impact on workers who have greater faith in management.

4. Feedback Frequency and the Relationship with Employee Engagement

- Workers who got unfavorable feedback more than twice a month showed lower levels of engagement.
- Higher levels of involvement were displayed by those who got both positive and negative comments.

5. Managerial Training and Feedback Delivery Impact:

- Employee engagement levels were better for managers who received feedback training than for those who did not.
- Employee responses to coaching-based and empathetic feedback were superior to those that only received corrective criticism.

SUGGESTIONS

For managers to give constructive criticism, organizations should put in place systematic training programs. Feedback shouldn't only point out errors; it should also suggest solutions. When workers receive unfavorable criticism, they ought to be encouraged to express their opinions. Regular engagement surveys should be carried out by organizations to find out how staff members feel about feedback systems. Worker's ought to believe that criticism is provided impartially and fairly. Following unfavourable comments, businesses ought to provide training, coaching, or mentorship. To act on feedback, employees should have access to resources for self-improvement.

1. Redesign systems for delivering feedback

Make use of the sandwich method of feedback (positive → negative → positive).

Instead, then providing feedback after the fact, schedule it at regular times.

Give unfavorable criticism in person or over video conversations, where tone and body language are easier to read, rather than by email or text.

2. Programs for Managerial Training

Educate managers on:

Emotional intelligence (EI) to comprehend the responses of employees.

Managing conflicts to deal with defensive actions.

Constructive criticism methods combined with simulation and role-playing activities.

To help employees feel heard, promote active listening during feedback sessions.

3. Fairness & Clarity Feedback Guidelines

To guarantee uniformity, establish a common feedback framework for all departments.

Give precise improvement-oriented action items with quantifiable results.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study provides important insights, there are certain limitations:

1. Limited Sample Size:

Only 100 workers from various industries participated in the study, which may not be entirely representative of the workforce as a whole.

2. Self-Reported Data Bias:

Employees may not have completely disclosed their genuine emotions regarding feedback because the data was gathered through questionnaires.

3. Other Factors Affecting Engagement:

This study did not focus on the numerous other factors that affect employee engagement, such as pay, work environment, and job role.

4. Subjectivity in Feedback Interpretation:

It might be challenging to standardize the impact of feedback because different employees may interpret it in various ways.

CONCLUSION

Employee behavior and company culture are significantly shaped by negative comments. According to this study, constructive criticism may be a very effective tool for engagement and development if it is given with empathy, clarity, and a growth-oriented mindset. On the other hand, disengagement, low morale, and possible attrition result from criticism that is viewed as unfair, unduly critical, or emotionally insensitive.

Companies need to understand that employee engagement is a reflection of how appreciated and supported they feel, not just an HR number. Feedback affects long-term attitudes, psychological safety, and organizational commitment in addition to urgent performance adjustments. A systematic approach is necessary to create an effective feedback culture, one that involves educating managers about emotional intelligence, building trust, and providing communication training.

This study demonstrates that employee engagement is greatly impacted by negative feedback. However, the way the feedback is given determines the results.

- Disengagement results from receiving negative feedback on a regular basis without helpful recommendations.
- Positive employee reactions occur when feedback provides suggestions for improvement.
- Engagement levels are significantly influenced by the emotional effect of unfavorable comments.
- Enhancing managers' ability to give constructive criticism raises employee engagement.

In order to keep employee engagement levels high, companies should:

- Pay attention to fair and helpful criticism.
- Managers should receive training on how to offer feedback effectively.
- To monitor trends in employee engagement, use employee surveys.
- Put coaching and development initiatives into place to help staff members who are getting feedback.

In conclusion, the foundation of the relationship between engagement and negative feedback is execution, empathy, and intention. Even criticism, when used effectively, may spur career advancement and enhance workplace culture.

FUTURE SCOPE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A longitudinal approach should be taken into account in future research to assess the long-term effects of frequent feedback on worker morale and output. Furthermore, cross-cultural analyses would offer a worldwide viewpoint on variations in feedback reception. Organizations are advised to incorporate anonymous feedback methods, conduct training modules on continual feedback, and foster a culture that views feedback as a tool for growth rather than something to be dreaded. In order for managers to effectively handle delicate interactions, emphasis should also be made on developing emotional intelligence.

How negative feedback is received when sent via video conferences, chat platforms, or emails is another important topic of research given the growing usage of digital communication technologies for remote and hybrid workforces. The tone, timing, and clarity of digital feedback may influence its emotional and motivating impact differently compared to face-to-face communication. Future studies should also look at how organizational trust and psychological safety can mitigate the harmful impacts of feedback. Employees may be more open to constructive criticism when they feel safe and have faith in their superiors' motives. In a similar vein, investigating the ways in which personal characteristics like emotional stability, openness, or resilience impact feedback response may result in the creation of individualized, employee-centered feedback strategies.

Recommendations:

Organizational Recommendations: Establish Training Programs for Structured Feedback

Supervisors' ought to receive training on how to provide constructive criticism. Employees' negative emotional reactions can be decreased by attending workshops on emotional intelligence, empathy, tone, and nonverbal clues.

Create a System of Balanced Feedback

Use a "feedback sandwich" strategy, where you begin with a compliment, offer helpful criticism, and conclude with words of encouragement. To keep morale high, strike a balance between acknowledging accomplishments and providing negative comments.

Make Regular Use of Engagement Surveys

To evaluate the success of feedback procedures and track changes in employee motivation, contentment, and morale over time, administer anonymous employee engagement surveys.

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