

PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS AND THEIR  
DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIP: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Wendy E. Ruona, Ph.D.)

ABSTRACT

Performance management is a building block for companies to achieve their strategic and financial goals. This ongoing process requires partnership and communication between managers and employees, which can be challenging to sustain. The purpose of this study was to explore manager-employee performance feedback conversations (PFCs) and their developmental relationship. An HR professional at Greystone led an action research (AR) team consisting of managers and individual contributors at all levels of the Consultancy Department in a two-year study impacting over 300 employees. In addition to working with the AR team, interviews were conducted separately with manager-employee pairs from other Greystone business units regarding their experiences with PFCs and their respective roles in the manager-employee developmental relationship. The three questions that guided the research were: (1) What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships? (2) What

conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations? and (3) What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture? Qualitative data were generated using several methods, including anecdotal conversations, meeting notes, email correspondence, semi-structured interviews, personal journal notes, and organizational documents. The data were analyzed inductively and deductively using the constant comparative method (Ruona, 2005). The AR team followed Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) AR cycle consisting of four basic steps for conducting action research: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. In the AR cycle the AR team designed, they piloted and implemented four interventions for the Consultancy Department: a PFC guide for managers and online library, a performance review self-assessment, a development plan center, and an internal resume review webinar. In addition, the researcher conducted interviews – a fifth intervention – to explore PFCs and developmental relationships in depth. The study identified the elements that are necessary to facilitate effective PFCs and offered insight into the barriers facing managers who conduct PFCs, while the AR process illustrated how change initiatives can fall short of desired results. Opportunities exist to cultivate work environments that support PFCs and foster developmental relationships between managers and employees.

**INDEX WORDS:** performance management, performance feedback, developmental relationship, management, HROD, HRD, human resources organizational development, human resource development, action research

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## DEDICATION

“I . . . can fly . . . like a bird in the sky.” - Nikki Giovanni

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Beverly Ann Scriber and Matthews William Wright, for your love, unlimited encouragement, and guidance and for being exceptional role models; and to my brother, Jason Wright, for your originality, manifesting your creativity, and inspiring me.

Isn't she lovely? Life and love are the same

Life is Aisha, the meaning of her name

Londie, it could have not been done

Without you who conceived the one

That's so very lovely, made from love

-Stevie Wonder, *Isn't She Lovely*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The corporate workplace is dynamic, fast-paced, and challenging. Performance management is an important pillar of success for firms in the marketplace. While some organizations are effective in using performance management to differentiate high performers from low performers, many still struggle to move performance management from an HR process to something that is business-critical to the organization (World at Work, 2010, p. 3).

Performance feedback conversations (PFCs) are among the most sensitive conversations that occur between managers and employees. The way information is shared, received, and processed during and after these conversations is critical to engaging in a successful and effective PFC. Outcomes can be positive, negative, or neutral for the individual, group, and organization. PFCs are part of the backbone of organizational success. The action research case study conducted within Greystone, Inc., provided valuable findings that will contribute to the Greystone leadership team, the field of performance management, and more broadly the field of human resources.

#### **The Client Site: Greystone, Inc.**

The client is Greystone, Inc.,<sup>1</sup> a large service firm. Currently, the company employs over 100,000 employees globally. The major lines of business are divided into information technology, sales and marketing, quality, and operations. Under the umbrella

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym



of the Operations division are a plethora of products and services that help businesses maintain optimal productivity.

The business unit within the Operations division in which the research will take place is called the Customer-Focused Organization (CF Organization). The CF Organization encompasses three major departments: Planning, Consultancy, and Finance. The study takes place within the Consultancy Department, which is the major operational component of the CF Organization. There are over 300 employees within this organization. Within this organization, it has been found that performance appraisal discussions between managers and employees are not effective; this issue is the focus of the Action Research (AR) team. In addition, to further explore the impact of developmental relationships between managers and their employees, interviews were conducted with managers and their employees in the CF Organization at large.

### **State of Performance Management in the Customer-Focused Organization**

Exploring the current state, future state, and gaps that exist in between these helps develop an understanding of the context in which the research questions are situated. A review of company documents, including reports of previous surveys and data collected on the research topic, enabled the researcher to assess the current state of the CF Organization (with more focus on the Consultancy Organization). This data helped the research team establish a justification for addressing barriers and identifying opportunities for improvement.

The data review included a CF leadership needs assessment survey, the 2010 and 2011 Consultancy Employee Engagement surveys, a CF leadership team effectiveness survey, and additional company documents. The CF data collected included information

on the Consultancy Organization. The AR team identified both barriers and opportunities for improvement for the Consultancy Organization. After an initial scan of the environment in the Consultancy Organization, the team found important factors to consider in investigating perceived performance management challenges, along with assumptions externally impacting the performance management process. The CF Human Resources (HR) Team made four major assumptions based on past experiences, including: (1) managers create yearly goals without collaboration, (2) meaningful, structured feedback is not consistent across the organization, (3) feedback is driven by the external client experience, and (4) there is not a comfort level for managers and employees to have two-way dialogues regarding performance. It is believed that the current workplace dynamics do not offer a safe space for effective performance dialogues at all levels of the organization. This was a significant barrier to strategic business success.

This background provided a data landscape for understanding the context of the presenting problem and culture of the CF and Consultancy Organizations. This information laid the groundwork for developing interventions and for further data collection. Three findings were uncovered: (1) data indicated that there was an undercurrent of non-communication in the client organization; (2) there was evidence suggesting that the CF Organization management team had challenges communicating among themselves, which impacted the larger organization; and (3) data also suggested that the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees could be improved. The need to improve the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees is the focus of the action research project within Greystone.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to explore the manager-employee developmental relationship and the building blocks of effective PFCs. The research is taking place within a client system, utilizing action research as a methodology. Five interventions will be used to examine these two topics. First, the PFCs have been explored through 1) the implementation of the manager PFC guide and online library, 2) the performance review self-assessment center, 3) virtual internal resume sessions, 4) in-person and virtual individual development plan sessions , and 5) manager-employee interviews. The first four interventions provided Consultancy Department managers and employees with education and tools to facilitate more effective, higher quality PFCs. The interviews explored the manager-employee developmental relationship with participants outside of the CF organization.

This study will enable the researcher to draw conclusions about how managers take up their role as leaders in PFCs and how employees receive information and use it. The study will also examine the progression of these conversations, the impact of the developmental relationship on the effectiveness of PFCs, and whether and how managers, employees, and their relationships evolve as a result of or in spite of PFCs.

Understanding PFCs in a holistic manner is essential to sustaining behavioral change and supporting effective, productive, and collaborative manager-employee relationships over time. The following research questions will guide this investigation:

1. What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?
2. What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?
3. What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?

### **Significance**

Performance management is an important pillar in the inner workings of business. This AR study is important to the field of performance management because it: 1) allows for further insight into manager-employee relationships, 2) helps organizations learn about the impact of organizational culture on managers and employees, and 3) provides perspective for managers as they mature in their roles. The literature suggests that a high level of collaboration is necessary on the part of managers and employees; that managerial skills have shifted over the last two decades from only management of people to management of people in addition to having a job themselves; and that companies will set the tone and determine the means through which managers demonstrate behaviors that support PFCs and build developmental relationships. The work of the AR team will contribute to the field of performance management by advancing our understanding of the current state of PFCs, developmental relationships, and the conditions that are necessary for managers to be successful in these conversations and in cultivating relationships with their employees.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In light of the competitiveness of the marketplace and the state of the global economy, many businesses are seeking to fortify their internal talent by fostering a high performance culture. Developing and maintaining a high performance culture within an organization begins with establishing clear standards and policies in conjunction with a performance management (PM) system. The focus of this literature review is to explore the state of the performance management and evaluation literature, encompassing both conceptual and empirical work, and specifically to study effective, high quality performance feedback discussions. This chapter will also include a historical review of performance management.

The literature regarding performance management is vast. In order to organize the literature, five major themes were identified and used to create a framework: congruency of the performance assessment system, bias avoidance, bolstering credibility, developmental aspects, and delivery and accuracy. To build upon this framework, I will introduce a model later in the literature review that illustrates the progressive collaboration between managers and employees in the performance management process.

Performance management is a fiscal process that can be enhanced by increasing the levels of manager and employee engagement. Those most impacted by the lack of performance feedback within the CF and Consultancy Organizations are the employees (individual contributors), who are not receiving sufficient feedback regarding their performance. This review will provide an overview of the research on performance

management, with a specific focus on the variables related to managers and performance feedback dialogues.

### **Methodology**

There are two main justifications for the present research. First, preliminary research reveals that while many researchers have addressed this topic, the information available is siloed into specific tactics or approaches for managers. Secondly, few articles have examined how these conversations are impacted by organizations. There is an opportunity for more holistic research regarding the mechanisms for providing effective PFCs and the organizational influences that exist.

Three main research questions guided this research. They exploring PFCs and the developmental relationships between managers and employees.

1. What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?
2. What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?
3. What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?

Over 223 articles were generated from 50 robust search strings with parameters for peer-reviewed articles. The research databases used included: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsychInfo, Education Administration Abstracts, and the Vocational Collection. Articles collected

covered the time frame of 2000-2014. Key words and phrases used to search for these articles included:

- Performance, human resource development
- Organizational development, appraisal
- Assessment
- Performance management
- Performance management systems
- Performance management process
- Employee appraisal
- Evaluation
- Manager employee relationship
- Leader subordinate exchange
- Supervisor subordinate exchange
- Manager leadership
- Manager mentoring
- Manager career advice
- Corporate culture
- Organizational culture
- Service quality culture
- Internal service culture

It is important to note that the words *system* and *process*, as well as the terms *appraisal* and *management*, are interchangeable, as discovered during the preliminary review of literature. It is also important to note that the *performance management process*

refers to an overall process, while *performance feedback conversations* take place within this process over a period of time. These conversations are building blocks within the overall process, and the conversations and the process have a symbiotic relationship. A total of 58 articles and book excerpts were chosen to review. The categories incorporated in the literature review are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Categories of Articles Researched and Reviewed for Literature Review (n=58).*

Category	Articles Used for Literature Review
Systems and Instrumentation	9
Manager	7
Employee	15
Context	12
Corporate Culture	7
Developmental Relationship	8

Based on this review of literature, a range of topics is adjacent to the central focus area of effective performance feedback. This range includes literature related to the themes of systems and instrumentation, managers, employees, and context. These four themes were adapted from Armstrong and Baron (1998) and the definitions below will be used to define these themes.

*System/instrumentation* encompasses a foundation of shared knowledge, an aptitude for performance management, and the performance management process itself (inclusive of a technology perspective). *Manager* refers to the best practices presented in the literature related to the manager's role. *Employee* themes incorporate the best practices from the literature that are linked to employees' role in the performance process. Lastly, *contextual* themes are defined as ideas that involve the employee and manager, the organizational environment, and the overall process of performance

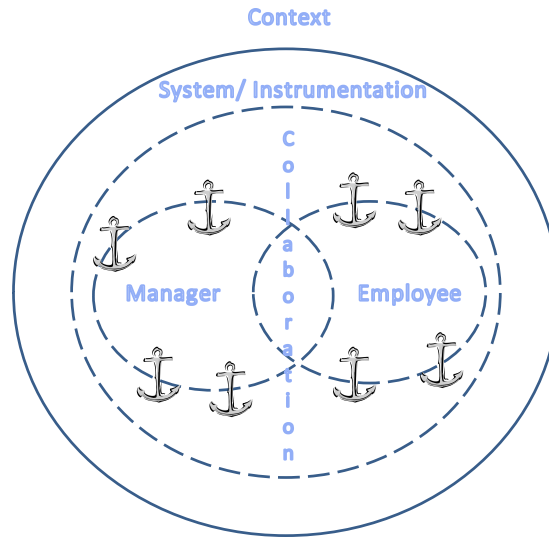


assessment. These key themes are closely linked to one another, yet each offers a distinct lens and makes a unique contribution to our understanding of the performance management process.

### **The Literature through the Lens of a Performance Collaboration Model**

The performance management literature heavily reflects empirical and conceptual research related to the best practices of employee and manager roles. These themes naturally provide a connection between the roles of the manager and employee. The performance collaboration model includes considerations for the performance management process that is specific to PFCs. Themes of employee and manager are the centerpiece of this research model, while the remaining themes of system/instrumentation and context structure the framework.

Considering the themes that emerged in the literature review, it was helpful to develop a research model to illustrate them. These themes influence the quality and effectiveness of the performance dialogues that occur between managers and their direct reports. In addition, two of the linkages discovered in the literature review were collaboration and participation. *Collaboration* is defined as the partnership between managers and employees. *Participation* focuses on the importance and awareness of manager and employee roles. These were included (under the title of collaboration) within the model to provide further information to use as a guide while reviewing the research focused on the theme of the manager.

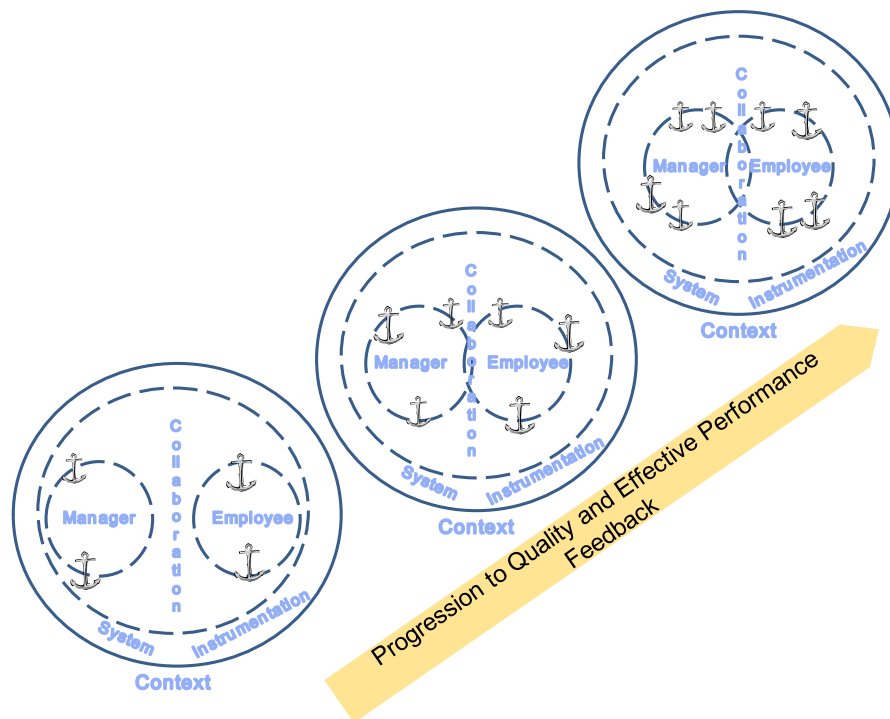


*Figure 1.* Performance Collaboration Model

The quality and effectiveness of a performance dialogue are supported by ongoing interaction between manager and employee. The final component of the model, the “anchors,” represent the interventions and skills that support collaboration and relationship building between the manager and employee with respect to creating a feedback-rich environment. An example of an “anchor” (an intervention to support collaboration in performance feedback discussions) would be refining interpersonal communication through professional coaching to improve the skill level of the manager or employee in these performance feedback conversations. The importance of anchors will be discussed in further detail below.

For the purposes of this literature review, the anchors (interventions to support collaboration in performance feedback discussions) discussed will be from a managerial standpoint. The managerial anchor categories of congruency, bias avoidance, credibility, development, and feedback delivery will inform how initial behavioral change can occur for managers. “Sub-anchors” will also be introduced under each managerial anchor to

further organize the literature as it is discussed. Table 2 presents the managerial anchors, sub-anchors, and interventions that will be reviewed.



*Figure 2. Progressive Performance Collaboration Model*

If we take the model to a higher level, it can be used to illustrate an ideal collaborative relationship between managers and their employees that develops over time. Theoretically, as the manager and the employee utilize, integrate, and create habits from suggested interventions to support the performance management process, collaboration will increase. Thus, the model suggests a positive progression of performance feedback conversations. Specifically, such conversations can be more effective, of higher quality, and embody an increased understanding of the performance feedback process.

Table 2

*Managerial Anchors, Sub-Anchors, and Descriptions of Interventions for Effective Performance Feedback Conversations*

<b>Managerial Anchors of Interventions for Effective Performance Dialogues</b>	<b>Managerial Sub-Anchor</b>	<b>Specific Description of Intervention</b>
Congruency and the Performance Assessment System	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional growth model for managers</li> <li>• Integrated PAS rollout inclusive of stakeholders point of view</li> <li>• Coaching and counseling</li> </ul>
Bias Avoidance	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of bias from positive escalation</li> <li>• Assessing direct and indirect observation</li> <li>• Incremental intervention with managers</li> </ul>
Bolstering Credibility	Source Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers building trust</li> <li>• Managers recognizing situational constraints on individual accomplishments</li> <li>• Managers taking the necessary time to facilitate open and honest discussions</li> <li>• Tailoring performance feedback to the individual</li> </ul>
	Fairness in Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effects of absolute or comparative rating formats</li> <li>• Avoid use of subjective performance assessments</li> <li>• Using performance assessments for developmental purposes</li> </ul>
	Rater Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers engaging with employees to learn about work activities to increase trust</li> <li>• Authoritative approach to product reliable PM ratings</li> </ul>
	Mastering Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of managerial moral responsibility</li> </ul>
Developmental Aspects	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separation of performance and developmental appraisals</li> <li>• Relationship building and strengthening the psychological contract</li> <li>• Employee coaching as a motivational strategy</li> <li>• Mentoring to provide support to employees</li> <li>• Non-instructional and instructional manager interventions to reduce performance gaps</li> </ul>

<b>Managerial Anchors of Interventions for Effective Performance Dialogues</b>	<b>Managerial Sub-Anchor</b>	<b>Specific Description of Intervention</b>
Delivery & Accuracy	Delivery of Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical feedback and avoidance</li> <li>• Emotional awareness: managers delivering feedback through self-questioning</li> <li>• Cues and coding: deconstructing the feedback conversation for enhanced two-way conversation</li> <li>• Self-rating and the positive impact on the PM process</li> <li>• Providing space for employees to express their feelings during the PM process</li> <li>• Managers modeling healthy emotional expression</li> </ul>
	Time and Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers providing adequate time for performance feedback</li> <li>• Manager observation and feedback for perceived appraisal accuracy</li> <li>• Practices for collaborating with employees</li> <li>• Managers sharing information with employees about fairness</li> <li>• Tailoring PM feedback to the employee</li> </ul>
	Creating Mutual Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers understanding underlying performance to create shared mental models with employees</li> <li>• Managers demonstrating a neutral to positive orientation to negative PM assessments</li> <li>• Organizations reframing from training managers to recognize errors to increase rater accuracy</li> </ul>
	Fostering a Productive Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers ensuring subordinate development to stimulate high-performance culture</li> <li>• Appraisal feedback leading to increased worker productivity</li> <li>• Work-life balance practices for managers</li> <li>• Stress management practices for managers</li> <li>• Driving employee participation in the PM process</li> </ul>

### **Managerial Anchors of Interventions for Effective Performance Dialogues**

Five intervention categories support the managerial anchors for effective performance dialogues, illustrating the collaboration between managers and employees in the performance management process. The following topics help create a line of sight to the themes in the literature, provide insight, and support the research.

- Congruency and the performance assessment system
- Bias avoidance
- Bolstering credibility
- Developmental aspects
- Delivery and accuracy

*Congruency and the performance assessment system (PAS)* refers to alignment at all levels in an organization (systems, employees, and management). *Bias avoidance* involves self-awareness for managers with regard to values, epistemology, and understanding the PAS to ensure fairness. *Bolstering credibility* describes the managers' role in positioning themselves to gain employees' trust while facilitating the feedback process. *Developmental aspects* refer to managers providing career- or skill-enhancing opportunities through assessments. *Delivery and accuracy* describes best practices managers can employ to ensure accuracy in performance feedback. The following sections will review the literature related to each of these managerial anchors.

### **Congruency and the Performance Assessment System**

The first managerial anchor can be described as how aligned the manager's role is with the concepts they need to know support performance assessment systems. Managers should be familiar with the existing performance management system, but also knowledgeable about their role in the process; they should also be aware of how alignment with this system manifests at all levels of the organization. This ensures that they are prepared to orient their employees to a successful performance management process.

Rausch (2004) believed that supervisors must develop an understanding of continuous improvement leadership concepts to support the overall performance process. He argued that rather than seeking to fix the system, working with the people who interact with the system will make the process most successful. Rausch proposed a professional growth model to assist managers in overcoming this learning curve. Elements of this model include "(a) focus on employee success, (b) priority for leadership development training for supervisors and (c) special performance appraisal process for those employees who need targeted focus in performance" (Rausch, 2004, p. 407). Behavioral change can be a challenge, but it is important to explore given the limitations that may exist with a PAS and the importance of creating a system that supports the dialogue between managers and employees.

Rausch's (2004) view underscores the notion that "leadership training is vital to organizational success and in fostering internal desire among people" (p. 413).

Managerial roles in the performance management process are vital in guiding and supporting employees in an inspirational manner to evoke behavioral change.

In addition to managers developing an understanding of concepts that support them in their role and help them manage the PAS. Perceptions and acceptance of the PAS are equally important as well. Blume, Baldwin, and Rubin's (2009) research found that participants were highly impacted by the consequences of the system for performers:

Respondents were most inclined to find attractive those systems that had less stringent consequences for low performers, higher differentiation of rewards, large comparison groups, and frequent feedback. The consequences for low performers had the single most powerful influence on their attraction to different Forced Distribution Systems (FDS). (Blume et al., 2009, p. 86)

Participants were more comfortable with a system that was not as punitive to low performers, varied rewards based on performance, and was based in data. The researchers concluded that organizations need to be aware of what elements are important from the stakeholder's point of view. In addition, those concerns and ideas should be integrated with the introduction and rollout of a PAS to promote usage and acceptance. Blume et al. (2009) explained, "if feedback is not of relatively high importance to the perceived attractiveness of FDS, then other issues may rightly assume more attention in the design and execution of such systems" (p. 87). The authors viewed collaboration between manager and employees, along with the perceived fairness and attractiveness of the



evaluation system, as necessary elements in creating an optimal environment for effective performance feedback.

Ndambakuwa and Mufunda (2006) explored the importance of organizational ownership in relation to PAS systems, which support collaboration. They found that the “empowerment of the employees and their ownership of any program is a critical factor to that activity (or program), including PAS” (p. 124). The PAS system can thus impact the effectiveness of manager and employee performance feedback conversations.

Wong and Snell (2003) explored the factors that support alignment of performance management practices. Performance management practices were inclusive of the overall PM system, expectations of organizational, management, and employee roles. They explain that non-task performance domains such as cross-functional collaboration, gaining customer trust, and developing tailored solutions are essential to sustaining a competitive advantage (Wong & Snell, 2003, p. 64). The core competencies that manifest within the organization are closely linked to the effectiveness of the system and the collaborative effort between management and individual contributors.

Whiting, Kline, and Sulsky’s (2008) study supports Wong and Snell’s research. Whiting et al. studied the congruency between the PAS and predictions of overall system satisfaction, usefulness, and fairness. Greater congruency between the system and the employees’ understanding of the performance management process, they believed, would increase the probability that employees’ attitudes about PAS can be predicted. Wong and Snell concluded that “regular informal meetings and discussions between the appraiser and appraisee are also desirable to enable both parties to develop a shared understanding and genuine appreciation for employees’ less visible virtues” (p. 62). The researchers

emphasized the importance of collaboration and the need to create a safe space in which to explore mutual views about performance. In addition, they raised awareness of employees' hidden dimensions that contribute to the success of the organization through performance-based conversations.

Williams and Levy's (2000) study reinforced the role of managers in the performance management process, finding that "supervisory positions report higher levels of knowledge about the appraisal process, the standards used for evaluation, and the goals of the appraisal system than those in nonsupervisory positions" (p. 511). Therefore, it is the responsibility of managers to ensure that employees understand the performance management process and related systems. Furthermore, employees are at a disadvantage due to their level in the organization, adding to the importance of "enhanced collaboration with managers and organizationally as a whole" (Williams & Levy, 2000, p. 512).

Nickols (2007) explored potential detrimental effects of the performance management process, arguing that "performance appraisal systems actually erode performance over time as a result of people setting goals that are achievable" (p. 13). This finding suggests that employees may set goals that are not challenging. Nickols concludes, "management might control the lower limits of productivity, but employees are clearly in control of the upper limits" (p. 13). In addition, the author argues that key elements of performance management, such as coaching, could take place without a formal appraisal system. Managers can take advantage of "real coaching and counseling sessions that shape and improve employee performance [that] occur informally" (Nickols, 2007, p. 16). In light of the importance of collaboration, Nickols identifies gaps

in the current performance management literature to raise awareness and stimulate change toward a more holistic perspective.

These researchers focused on congruency of performance management systems and their users. They investigated supervisors' leadership and competency development, perceptions of PAS from an acceptance perspective, and the erosion of the performance management process. When implementing or utilizing a new PAS, organizational intentions, buy-in, alignment, and communication from leadership are all extremely important, and have a considerable downstream impact on effective performance management dialogues.

### **Bias Avoidance**

The second managerial anchor represents those mechanisms that aid managers' awareness of pitfalls of bias that exist in the performance management process. Specifically, managers must possess awareness of their own values and epistemology, as well as a clear understanding of the PAS, to ensure fairness. Three articles provided conceptual and experimental insight into this dynamic by examining positive escalation, indirect/direct performance observation, and awareness of assumptions.

Slaughter and Greguras (2008) found through newly minted managers that positive escalation bias influenced supervisor ratings, which led to unfair practices (p. 414). Managers were a part of a panel of interviewers and had the opportunity to select or reject those interviewed. The collective results of the interviewers determined which candidates were hires. There were instances where candidates were hired even though there might have been interviewers (managers) that rejected them in the interview, however their overall interview results overall superseded the rejections. Specifically,

ratings were biased more positively when managers rated the performance of a salesperson they personally selected for hire. They found that results were not biased downward, however, when managers rated the performance of a salesperson they rejected in the hiring process (Slaughter & Greguras, 2008, p. 414). When managers were involved in the hiring process for salespeople their performance assessments had a halo or leniency effect. These results suggest that positive escalation, but not negative escalation, was the cause of the bias.

This finding has compliance and ethical implications for organizations. The researchers believed:

bias in evaluations may unfairly reward or promote some employees, in that such rewards are not based on actual performance. Therefore, to be fair to all employees, it may be important to have other individuals who were not directly responsible for the hiring decisions provide input into employee performance ratings. (Slaughter & Greguras, 2008, p. 422)

Implementing this recommendation would provide objective and balanced input to ratings, supporting a fair and just performance feedback process.

Golden, Barnes-Farrell, and Mascharka (2009) found in their research with supervisors that those who work virtually need to use both in-person and virtual observations of performance as a basis for employee performance ratings. Their study found that these managers relied more heavily on indirect performance information than direct observation of their employees when conducting performance appraisals. The researchers advise managers to intentionally observe both their employees' on-site work and their virtual work to obtain a balanced perspective. They propose that by "structuring

observational opportunities in the office to include an array of behavioral episodes, supervisors may help ensure requisite variety in observations that are representative of accurate performance levels” (Golden et al., 2009, p. 1603). Managers’ aptitudes to assess indirect and direct performance data can help them evolve their approach to minimize bias avoidance during performance feedback conversations.

Heslin and VandeWalle (2008) studied managers’ awareness of their assumptions about employees and the impact of these assumptions on their perceptions of employee performance. This article focuses on the way managers’ mindsets may be derived from implicit theories. To the extent that managers assume that personal attributes are fixed traits that are largely stable over time, they tend to inadequately recognize actual changes in employee performance and thus have an inappropriately discipline to coach employees (based on a assumptions instead of recognizing the facts and behavior changes over time) regarding how to improve their performance (Heslin, Latham, & VandeWalle, 2005, p. 219). Essentially, managers need to rely on facts as opposed to personal but non-factually based stories they have constructed when conducting PFCs.

Heslin and VandeWalle (2008) presented an intervention to help managers grow beyond their assumptions, develop a more open mindset about their employees, and provide honest and accurate subjective and objective feedback. The implicit theories that managers hold “focus on psychological factors, other than ability, that determine how effectively the individual acquires and uses skills” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040). The two streams of Dweck’s work on implicit theory are “fixed mindset” or “entity implicit theory,” and “growth mindset” or “incremental implicit theory” (Dweck, 2006). Fixed mindset assumes that personal attributes constitute a largely stable entity that tends to not

change much over time. Growth mindset assumes that personal attributes are relatively malleable and believes that individuals can change and develop their behavior over time, particularly when they devote a concerted effort to learning and applying more effective strategies for task performance (Dweck, 2006).

Based on the implicit theory research of Levy, Stroessner., & Dweck, (1998), Dweck (2006), Heslin, and VanWalle (2008) concluded that managers are impacted by their implicit theories and set out to explore to what extent this occurs. The authors studied the impact of the interventions they developed.

The intervention the researchers developed was an incremental intervention based on principles of self-persuasion (Aronson, 1999) that exposed those with a distinct fixed mindset to the following five components: scientific testimony, counter-attitudinal idea generation, counter-attitudinal reflection, counter-attitudinal advocacy, and cognitive dissonance. (cited in Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008, p. 222)

The authors found that after six weeks of using this intervention, managers shifted to less fixed mindsets. They exhibited a relatively enduring increase in their incrementalism that provided employees with a greater quantity and quality of suggestions for improving performance. They also expressed a greater acknowledgment of improvement in employee performance than fixed-mindset managers in the placebo condition (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008, p. 222). These findings are helpful for management and human resource professionals when enhancing or implementing a performance appraisal process.

Heslin and VanWalle (2008) sought to help managers to provide more balanced

feedback, increase self-awareness, enhance the fairness of performance evaluation, and manage assumptions. When managers are involved in an employee's hiring process, they have a tendency to want their hires to succeed, and thus may rate them higher than other employees. If a manager is unaware of what information should be used to provide a balanced appraisal, it leaves room for inaccuracies. However, managers who are aware of their perceptions can more accurately assess performance. These studies lend insight into how managers can avoid bias to create more effective feedback conversations.

### **Bolstering Credibility**

The third managerial anchor describes how managers can position themselves to build relationships with and gain trust from employees, thus establishing credibility for the performance management process. Managers should be a trustworthy resource for feedback. Thirteen studies provides insight into the four managerial sub-anchors of source credibility, fairness, rater accuracy, and mastering feedback.

**Source credibility.** To explore the establishment of source credibility among managers, Kinicki, Prussia, Wu, and McKee-Ryan (2004) administered a Likert-scale questionnaire to managers and their employees following an annual performance assessment period. The researchers found that employees perceived "their feedback was more accurate when it came from trustworthy and competent managers" (Kinicki et al., 2004, p. 1067). The researchers used a revised conceptual model created by Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) that represented the foundation of many subsequent process feedback models to present two hypotheses regarding employee perceptions of manager credibility and feedback accuracy. The revised model "supports the validity and reliability of the feedback constructs . . . and demonstrates the independence between Ilgen et al.'s

cognitive mediators” (Kinicki et al., 2004, p. 1068). This study confirmed that the cognitive processes of perceived accuracy, desire to respond to feedback, and intended response to feedback impact the receipt of performance feedback. These results focus on managerial credibility, with a foundation of trust, for the ultimate goal of eliciting desired behavior change.

A study by Franke, Murphy, and Nadler (2003) found that advertising managers could improve the feedback process by developing or enhancing their credibility as a feedback source. The authors concluded that managers provide better feedback during performance dialogues when they are able to “explicitly recognize situational constraints on individual accomplishments, rather than making informal adjustments or ignoring factors completely” (Franke et al., 2003, p.10).

Franke et al. (2003), Gabris and Ihrke (2000), and Findley, Giles, and Mossholder (2000) found similar results in their respective studies as they explored how time affects the credibility of the leader in a performance management process. Time is necessary to prepare for accurate, open, and honest discussions with subordinates. Franke et al. (2003) found that to be perceived as credible leaders, managers need to take time to “explain the reasoning behind observed performance changes and share ideas with employees that will foster trust with employees” (p. 52). Providing examples of desired performance and constructive feedback to employees reinforces employees’ perceptions of the manager as a credible source for performance feedback.

In addition to the need for preparation and time to increase source credibility, a manager’s awareness of subordinates’ orientation to feedback is important. Atwater, Waldmann, and Brett (2002) concluded that those who “see themselves more similarly to



the way they are seen by others are better performers” (p. 199). Shared meaning and knowledge about performance increases buy-in from employees for improvement. Church (1997) and Atwater and Yammarino (1992) found that the highest performers were more likely than average performers to agree with other raters about their performance. Individuals who received feedback most discrepant with their own ratings (i.e., over-raters) believed the feedback was less accurate and less useful (as cited in Atwater et al., 2002, p. 200). In addition, these individuals were more likely to react in a negative manner.

Lastly, Atwater et al. (2002) focused on improving processes based on insights gained from multisource feedback formats (e.g., 360 degree feedback). Information provided during the 360 degree feedback process is transferable to general feedback conversations between managers and employees. In addition to the research discussed in this section regarding preparation and building trust, there is a compelling case for managers to integrate these core skills to enhance their source credibility and overall performance management effectiveness. These studies discussed varying aspects of source credibility which supports effective feedback conversations.

**Fairness in feedback.** The second managerial sub-anchor under bolstering credibility is fairness in feedback. Five studies explored fairness in the performance management process from the manager’s perspective. Findley et al. (2000) supported the notion that socially comparative performance assessments (comparing employees to one another) showed incremental criterion-related validity over absolute traditional performance rating methods. In addition, Goffin, Jelley, Powell, and Johnston (2009) conducted a related study using a sample of newly promoted managers to investigate

whether there were advantages to using absolute or socially comparative rating systems for subordinates. They found that “all the comparative formats, including the relative percentile method (RPM) (which means that ratings are scaled to allow for meaningful comparisons), were perceived to be less fair than noncomparative formats, such as the graphic rating scale and the behavioral observation scales” (Goffin et al., 2009, p. 263).

Three studies suggested avoiding the use of purely subjective performance assessments. Findley et al. (2000) and Franke et al. (2003) supported the importance of objective and balanced performance feedback to avoid bias and encouraged the use of comparative methods of assessing performance. These researchers believe that managers build trust by providing clear and substantive information to subordinates to increase their credibility and accuracy. They argue that managers should employ social comparative methods for appraisals, work with their subordinates to balance subjective and objective feedback assessments.

This approach supports procedural justice in the performance management process. Boswell and Boudreau (2000) explored fairness in relation to two justice variables: procedural and distributive justice. These two variables were originally used in Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, and Stoffey’s (1993) study to assess selection test fairness, but were adapted to reflect performance assessment fairness. Boswell and Boudreau found that “a significant positive relation between employee attitudes and procedurally just performance assessments underscores the importance employees place on fairness” (p. 295).

The researchers encouraged managers and organizations to ensure that employees perceive that the performance appraisal process is fair and used for developmental purposes. The following section, which discusses rater accuracy, has a close linkage to perceptions of fairness in performance feedback conversations.

**Rater accuracy.** These studies in this managerial sub-anchor focus on managers achieving the highest level of accuracy. Findley et al. (2000) hypothesized that supervisors are more likely to use contextual performance for performance appraisals when they endeavor to learn about employees' work activities in total, rather than assessing only formal work requirements or relying on performance information collected impersonally (e.g., output totals). Based on their study, this would result in increasing the perceived rater accuracy.

Second, Wilson and Jones (2008) suggest through their theoretical research an authoritative approach to performance management. They believed, "an authoritative approach will reduce the behaviors and consequences of discrimination, with the hope or expectation that underlying influences on attitudes will come with time and exposure" (Wilson & Jones, 2008, p. 58). The authors recommend an authoritative approach as a code of practice. Key guidelines that pertain to leaders are basing the performance appraisal on the analysis of job requirements and monitoring practices in the process.

Wilson and Jones (2008) argue that a manager's ability to provide reliable and accurate ratings of performance can be increased by employing several steps. These include defining job performance, providing examples of poor and excellent performers, providing a system for collecting and analyzing performance data, providing guidance on how to manage their team (incorporating performance feedback so it is not a surprise),

and including race and ethnicity awareness in the perceptions related to the framework of performance management. Their viewpoint is directly opposed that of Findley et al. (2000), as Wilson and Jones support an authoritative and compliance-oriented stance versus a collaborative and agile process for all parties involved. Wilson and Jones are in the minority in relation to the dominant perspective in the literature. The majority of researchers advocate using the traditional performance management process in conjunction with managerial and employee skills from an interpersonal and reflective standpoint to enhance the feedback process.

**Mastering feedback.** The last managerial sub-anchor under bolstering credibility is mastering feedback. Drongelen and Fisscher's (2003) study on the moral responsibilities of evaluators provided insight for managers seeking to master feedback. The responsibilities they identified included honesty about the intended use of the performance assessment system, utilizing comprehensive metrics, keeping the ratings in mind when setting norms and performance measures, selecting a method to consistently collect data on performance, and sharing performance information as the process intends. These are all important elements that enhance the delivery of accurate performance feedback.

The studies discussed under the major anchor of bolstering credibility provide conceptual and empirical findings to support an effective performance dialogue between managers and their employees. The four managerial sub-anchors within the anchor of bolstering credibility are source credibility, fairness, rater accuracy, and mastering feedback. A manager's perceptions, internal awareness of their positionality, understanding of context in their work environment, and willingness to seek

understanding of performance results are key elements in enhancing feedback discussions to elicit desired behavior. The relationship between these best practices can strengthen or weaken employees' perception of credibility, impacting the effectiveness of PFCs.

### **Developmental Aspects**

The fourth managerial anchor entails providing career- or skill-enhancing opportunities through performance feedback with employees. Ten articles provide insight into this managerial anchor. They cover separation of performance and developmental appraisals, relationship building as a means of strengthening the psychological contract, providing employee coaching as a motivational strategy, and mentoring.

Toegel and Conger (2003) and Boswell and Boudreau (2000) both favor traditional performance assessments over using multi-rater tools. Through research and reviews of previous literature on multi-rater feedback (e.g. 360 feedback assessment), they found that "ratees approve of these (multi-rater) appraisals when they are used for developmental purposes but are not as accepting when they are used for evaluation" (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000, p. 285). Boswell and Boudreau cited a study by Ash (1994) indicating that when subordinates supported an upward feedback appraisal system for managers that would be utilized both developmentally and for evaluation, managers were in opposition. This suggests that it is more acceptable for employees to receive feedback in a developmental framework rather than an evaluative one.

Toegel and Conger (2003) argued that distinct parameters must be upheld if multi-rater assessments are used for either evaluation or developmental purposes. These parameters include, but are not limited to, communication of the purpose to participants, frequency of use, linkage to competencies, and precise delineation of rater groups. They

believed there was an honesty mindset in multi-rater assessments for developmental use and an accuracy mindset for evaluative use. Due to this difference they believed it was difficult to use one tool for two purposes. The authors contended that there were significant implications at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels of using multi-rater assessments in an evaluative manner. Thus, the researchers were not in favor of the field moving in this direction.

Marsden's (2007) experiment with teachers in schools found that the nature of the employee and manager relationship is based on an agreement; specifically, "an initial negotiation and agreement between employer and employee" (Marsden, 2007, p. 1275). This agreement can vary in scope, but constitutes the beliefs and expectations that one has about their work. In essence, this is an agreement to allow management to direct an employee's work. These agreements, beliefs, and expectations build a psychological contract. Marsden (2007) argued that the "terms of this contract need to be periodically revised between managers and employees" (p. 1275).

Marsden's study was based in Rousseau's (1989) psychological contract theory. As Rousseau explained:

The psychological contract theory states that psychological contract breach may lead to the erosion of the foundation of the relationship. The intensity of how an individual responds to contract breach is directly attributable not only to unmet expectations of specific rewards or benefits, but also to more general beliefs about respect of persons, codes of conduct and other patterns of behavior employees with relationships involving trust. (p. 129)

It is crucial that managers build relationships with their direct employees. The nature of

building trust is linked to psychological, economical, and sociological aspects of work.

The work of Gilley, Gilley, and Konider (2010) built on the idea of the psychological contract. Their research, which was conducted on students, showed that “an important contributor to employee success was the relationship with the manager” (Gilley et al., 2010, p. 55). The research provided actionable results for managers to utilize. The authors found that “managerial coaching frequency, employee growth, and development supports previous literature regarding the relationship between manager and employee” (p. 55). Coaching was identified as a critical managerial competency.

The work of Marsden (2007), Heslin and VandeWalle (2008), and Cassidy and Medsker (2008) supports the belief that managerial coaching is an effective motivational strategy for employees. Cassidy and Medsker (2008) explain in that “growing more from organizational development than from performance improvement roots, the new coaching can nonetheless be classified, in performance engineering terms, as a motivational strategy” (p. 3). In the past, coaching was used primarily to transfer skills and knowledge. Boswell and Boudreau’s (2000) study supports this concept, leveraging coaching to transfer skills. They believe coaching shapes employees’ perceptions of performance development. Employees who perceive developmental opportunities in a PA may see this as a representation of their value to the company, resulting in a positive behavior change. Developmental activities such as determining individual training needs and identifying individual strengths and weaknesses appear to increase appraisal and appraiser satisfaction. Approaches such as coaching and mentoring should be taken into consideration to increase buy-in and commitment from employees regarding their development within the organization.

Major, Davis, Germano, Fletcher, Sanchez-Hucles, and Mann (2007) conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with high-performing IT supervisors to observe the best practices that support their success, and which can be transferred to manager roles in general. They found that high-performing IT supervisors demonstrated best practices in both task- and human resources-focused areas. The researchers found that mentoring was one of many opportunities to provide “psychological support, career development support, and facilitate peer mentoring” (Major et al., 2007, p. 414). The conceptual foundation of this study was transformational leadership theory. First introduced by Bass (1985), this theory emphasizes the need for managers to serve as aspirational examples for employees and to build trusting relationships to support performance management. Mentoring is one of many interventions that can support the manager-employee relationship.

A study by Marker, Huglin, and Johnsen (2006) illustrated that interventions developed from a managerial perspective provided structure for employee development. They reviewed performance literature from 2001-2005 and found that 22% of the studies included one or more interventions to reduce gaps in performance. These interventions were both non-instructional and instructional in nature. Specifically, the interventions that pertained to managers were:

- Team activities
- Mentoring
- OJT
- Conflict resolution
- Diagnosis



- Process consultation
- Goal-setting
- Scheduling reviews
- Job redesign
- Coaching
- Counseling
- Changes to performance appraisal system
- Culture
- Employee selection
- Employee assessment
- Motivational systems
- Feedback systems
- Performance support systems

This provides an excellent list of ways managers can impact employee performance at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

In summary, the research in this section investigated various aspects of the developmental relationship between managers and employees. They offer many interventions for managers to refine their skills in order to provide the best feedback possible. The relationship building, coaching, and mentoring managers employ underscore the psychological aspects of the performance management process. These supporting interventions have strong linkages to credibility, congruency, and bias avoidance in performance feedback dialogues. This finding demonstrates the importance of alignment of the manager's role and illustrates their importance when partnering with

employees.

### **Delivery and Accuracy**

The last managerial anchor describes how managers best assess and provide feedback on their employees' performance. A total of 22 articles provided insight into this best practice area. The managerial sub-anchors that will be discussed in this section include delivery of feedback, time and preparation, creating a mutual vision, and fostering a positive work environment.

**Delivery of feedback.** Six studies explored the managerial sub-anchor of delivery of feedback, focusing on expression and awareness of thoughts and feelings, perceived accuracy, and emotional dynamics. Cannon and Witherspoon's (2005) study examined how managers thoughts and feelings help to produce actionable feedback. Based on their literature review, the authors concluded that avoiding critical feedback is more painful (and less useful) than it should be. Cannon and Witherspoon (2005) drew on the research of McArthur, Putnam, and Smith (n. d.), DeNisi and Kluger (2000), Bandura (1990), Locke and Latham (1990), and Argyris (1982), and concluded:

not only do cognitive and emotional dynamics lead people to produce poor quality feedback, they also interfere with our ability to assess the quality of our own feedback, therefore, managers have a hard time knowing what to do differently to make their feedback more actionable. (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005, p. 124)

While it can be challenging for managers to improve their behavior, the first step is being aware of the desire to change. The authors believed that by becoming aware of "dynamics, enlisting third parties, and self-questioning, managers can deliver more

actionable feedback that produces greater learning, less defensiveness, and more appropriate action” (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005, p. 133).

The following experiments build on Cannon and Witherspoon’s (2005) study by exploring the perceived accuracy of performance feedback and the importance of subjective feelings. Supporting research on managers’ thoughts and feelings, Lissack (2007) found that both cue and coding ontologies exist during performance conversations. The researcher starts a conversation about how managers should integrate these two approaches in light of productivity and the manager and employee relationship. Lissack (2007) asks,

how many times have we found ourselves in the position of uttering what we believed to be explicit and direct instructions, only to be confronted with instructees who are equally firm in their belief that something different was said or meant? (p. 72)

Considering one’s way of thinking and one’s values in two-way conversation may prove to be a powerful tool to create shared meanings between managers and employees.

Kinicki, Prussia, Wu, and McKee-Ryan (2004) examined how managers’ delivery of feedback impacts the perceived accuracy of that feedback. Their research is designed to help managers think through approaches to delivering feedback that are likely to elicit the desired behavior in their employees. The researchers found that an “employee’s response to performance feedback is more contingent upon the cognitive processing of feedback than the characteristics of the feedback itself (i.e., specificity, frequency, and sign)” (Kinicki et al., 2004, p.1067). Reaction to an interpretation and understanding of the details of feedback is different from reacting to what actual feedback is initially heard

(which may be a more visceral reaction). The authors explain that managers should be cognizant of this and must be able to provide negative and positive feedback for a balanced conversation. In addition, they convey that “it is unlikely that employees will accurately perceive, have a desire to respond to, or intend to respond to feedback without instrumental leadership” (Kinicki et al., 2004, p. 1067).

It is important to note that research on goal orientation may be important in determining how individuals make use of feedback. Atwater et al. (2002) reflected:

employees with a learning goal orientation may initially react negatively to constructive feedback, but may eventually see the value in the feedback because of its potential for their development. Those with a performance goal orientation will continue to see the feedback as evaluative and not useful. These findings suggest that feedback delivery may need to be tailored to individual characteristics. (p. 202)

Managers should plan their approach to this type of conversation by thinking about their employee’s personality, past performance discussions, and previous reactions to gauge the best method for optimal reception of the feedback. They should explore ways to hone their professional and managerial skills to become more effective in their roles, to facilitate conversations, and to lead the overall feedback process.

Supporting this leadership skill of delivering balanced feedback, Inderrieden, Allen, and Keaveny (2004) explored how providing an opportunity for their direct reports to self-rate can create a positive relationship to PA reviews. Findings from their research indicate that self-ratings have an overall positive impact on the performance appraisal process. This can also serve as a catalyst for discussion during the appraisal interview,

satisfy the importance of an employee have a feeling of representation during the review, result in greater perceived fairness of ratings, and increase job satisfaction. Managers can also utilize employee self-ratings to plan their performance discussion, as such ratings provide valuable information from the employee's point of view.

Milliman, Nason, Zhu, and DeCieri (2002) conducted a survey across 10 countries to identify what is helpful in the PA process. The data derived from respondents in the Americas showed that “an important purpose of appraisal in these nations is to allow subordinates to express their thoughts and feelings” (Milliman et al., 2002, p. 98). Providing a space for open dialogue and the sharing of thoughts of or feelings is important in the performance feedback process, as it increases trust and credibility between managers and employees.

Lastly, Ashkanasy and Daus (2002) present preventative techniques managers can use to manage emotion. The theoretical backdrop for their study was the affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In the AET model, the nature of the job and any requirements for emotional labor affect behavior and work attitudes, but most importantly, they result in work events—the daily hassles and uplifts that every worker experiences (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002, p. 77). The researchers also discuss emotional intelligence in relation to managers' awareness of managing emotion in the workplace. Their research showed that “managers should model healthy emotional expression, which includes: attention to emotion perception in the workplace, in addition to attempt to be as genuine as possible when expressing emotion and honest in their communication about it” (Ashkansy & Daus, 2002, p. 82).

Utilizing emotional intelligence for monitoring and managing emotion in the

workplace and conducting conversations with employees about their performance can increase shared understanding and lead to optimal performance. Demonstrating emotional intelligence can help managers build trust with employees. This may also have a positive impact on employee perceptions, perceived accuracy, bias avoidance, and credibility in delivering performance feedback within the overall performance management process.

**Time and preparation.** The second managerial sub-anchor under delivery and accuracy involves taking time to explain employee performance and managing work-life balance in regard to their employees. Findley et al. (2000) concluded from their study of over 300 teachers that managers need to gather substantive information for an appraisal and take time to discuss feedback with the ratee. Allowing the appropriate time to discuss feedback reinforces the employee's value to the organization.

In addition to taking time to discuss performance and providing robust information to frame the discussion, Roberts (2003) noted that it is also important for managers to explain information provided to employees. Based on a meta-analysis of 27 studies, Roberts concluded:

a quality performance appraisal interview includes sensitivity to employee needs for privacy and confidentiality, giving the employee undivided attention during the appraisal interview, reserving adequate time for a full discussion of the issues, and both the supervisor and rater's being prepared. (p. 92)

Roberts' findings reinforce the need to set aside the necessary time to discuss performance while also providing comprehensive information to the ratee.

Findley et al.'s (2000) research also supported managerial preparation for performance feedback conversations. Findley et al. found that "the appraisal process

facets of supervisor observation and feedback and voice were both positively related to perceived appraisal accuracy” (p. 638). A manager assessment, use of observations, and the conversation that takes place all have a direct impact on whether and how employees receive, understand, and trust the accuracy of feedback.

In addition, Major et al. (2007, p. 414) offered key practices for sharing information and collaborating with subordinates. They cover a variety of important topics, including:

- Enlisting employee involvement
- Using a collaborative approach to decisions whenever possible
- Creating an environment in which employees can give and receive feedback
- Using teams for problem solving and knowledge sharing
- Encouraging personnel to engage in upward influence with senior managers
- Soliciting employee input to implement their ideas
- Allowing employees to disagree with supervisor

These suggested collaborative interventions provide a variety of means to facilitate a participatory PA process (inclusive of feedback conversations).

Jepsen and Rodwell (2009) conducted an experiment with over 300 employees in one organization. They found that improving the quality of the information managers share on the fairness (or justice implications) for employees is a relatively effective way of creating an environment that supports improved performance. Works by Gabris and Ihrke (2000) and Franke et al. (2003) echo these sentiments. In addition, Beaulieu and Love’s (2006) research found that tailoring feedback to the employee is an effective intervention in performance discussions. The participants’ responses indicated that the

feedback strategy that best fits the situation depends, at least in part, on the performance of the person evaluated (Beaulieu & Love, 2006, p. 78). The time and preparation set aside to share performance details with the employee and the messaging itself are important in the developing the relationship between manager and employee during the performance appraisal process.

**Creating a mutual vision.** The third managerial sub-anchor under delivery and accuracy is creating a mutual vision. Three articles explored the importance of managers developing a shared vision for performance. The themes under this area are shared mental models, orientation to assessments, and managerial training.

Vaughan (2003) believed that managers must understand the underlying performance of an employee to create shared mental models. Understanding the foundational performance of an employee helps managers recognize that “it becomes undesirable to separate the two strands of task-related and learning-related activity” (Vaughan, 2003, p. 379). Employees should also be valued in the process. Vaughan observes that “line managers appear, in general, to believe that it is *their* job to evaluate individual performance and, in ‘appraising’ performance, often leave the opinions of the employee out altogether or treat them less than seriously” (p. 379). A shared vision for successful performance that incorporates a recognition of business realities and the feasibility of achieving stated goals can help manage expectations during an appraisal discussion.

Asmuss (2008) found that supervisors need to show a neutral to positive orientation to negative assessments to help employees better cope with their assessment. They found that critical feedback was a socially problematic action despite the



institutional character of the talk. Although employees understand constructive feedback, negative feedback is often necessary to improve performance. Nevertheless, many managers find it challenging to provide negative feedback, just as employees find it difficult to receive it. Asmuss conducted a literature review using conversation analysis as a framework and completed a study with 11 participants, comprised of employees and their managers. The researchers suggested that managers set the expectation that employees “request negative feedback from the supervisor and the employee respectively as part of the interview (a form of institutionalized distinction between positive and negative feedback)” (Amuss, 2008, p. 425). The supervisor has a crucial role in defining problematic and non-problematic performance appraisal interviews.

London, Mone, and Scott (2004) conducted a conceptual review of literature related to goal setting and performance interviews. They suggest that organizations should refrain from training managers to recognize errors as the primary means to increase rater accuracy. Rater training should go beyond improving accuracy and should include providing constructive negative feedback (London et al., 2004, p. 332). Coaching, along with ongoing, timely, and specific feedback, play key roles in determining whether goals will lead to improvements in performance. These practices provide a process for employees to assess progress toward a goal and make necessary shifts in their strategy as appropriate. These findings support Beaulieu and Love’s (2006) research and provide key interventions for managers to develop a shared vision of feedback, adjust rater training, and create an orientation to a holistic delivery of performance feedback conversations.

**Fostering a productive work environment.** The last managerial sub-anchor under delivery and accuracy is fostering a productive work environment. Five articles within this section review the role of managers, distinguishing productivity-driven from performance feedback, managing work/life balance, and employee participation. First, den Hartog, Boselie, and Paauwe (2004) explore the role of the supervisor in fostering a productive work environment. The goal of their study was to develop a model for performance management with insights from literature on human resource management (HRM) and performance appraisals. The model presented the impact on employees' perceptions and attitudes of the aligned set of HRM practices involved in performance management, and proposed that front-line managers play a crucial mediating role in implementing these practices.

Perceptions and attitudes affect employee performance, which in turn affects organizational performance (den Hartog et al., 2004, p. 562). Managers should ensure possibilities for subordinates' development and stimulate a climate in which high performance is stressed. Thus, managers' skill and fairness in performing these tasks, as well as their relationships with their various subordinates, play a key role in the success of performance management. Findley et al.'s (2000) study supports the importance of the supervisor's role and performance management implications for the organization, manager, and employee.

Michie and West (2004) reflected on feedback and its linkages to worker productivity. Their study connects context, employee behavior, psychological consequences, and organizational performance. Michie and West found “evidence that performance feedback leads to increased productivity, which can be tracked and measured from an operational perspective, such as by quantifying job duties” (p. 98). The study stresses the importance of focusing on front line employees as managers lead the performance management process. These authors provide valuable insights for managers guiding their subordinates in the performance management process and sustaining an environment that promotes high performance.

Finally, the work of Major et al. (2007) explores how managers can facilitate work-life balance and manage employees’ stress. The following work-life balance best practices were suggested for managers to use:

- Encourage the use of organizational policies and programs (e.g., leave taking)
- Offer flexible hours and flexible scheduling
- Provide telework opportunities
- Have a flexible orientation and accommodate individuals on a case-by-case basis
- Include family in workplace social events

The following stress management best practices were also recommended for managers:

- Directly address stressors in environment
- Monitor stress levels and make work adjustments
- Engage work team in non-work social activities
- Facilitate use of company-sponsored programs (e.g., vacation time)

- Have fun on the job and use humor,
- Encourage coworker support
- Give employees time off.

Managers should serve as a guide for employees, professionally and personally, to foster a feedback-rich environment.

Managers also drive employees' participation in the performance management process. Roberts (2003) identified factors that thwart employee participation, including lack of training, absence of rater accountability, and resistance to honest/open feedback. While there are many things to abstain from, managers should be mindful about their treatment of employees in the appraisal process. The researcher also recommended that,

managers should avoid favoritism and foster unequal employee treatment. If employees perceive they will be punished for disagreeing or making mistakes, this thwarts open and trusting communication. Rater training in participatory performance appraisal will provide tools to conceptually, affectively, and experientially frame the performance appraisal. This is inclusive of conflict management, goal setting, counseling, providing feedback, and avoiding rater errors. Managers need to continually question their beliefs regarding worker motivation, ability and performance specially for poorly performing employees.

(Roberts, 2003, p. 94)

Managers have an integral role in fostering a participatory environment for employees in the performance management process.

The four managerial sub-anchors, under the main anchor of delivery and accuracy, provide supporting research that can enhance collaboration and partnership. These sub-anchors directly strengthens or weakens congruency, credibility and bias avoidance in performance feedback dialogues. The level of self- and other-awareness in this process is keenly important. Managers have the ability to enable a productive work environment, create shared visions with their direct reports, and demonstrate diligence in preparing for these discussions.

### **The Importance of Developmental Relationships and Corporate Culture**

The performance collaboration model helps to thematically describe the literature and emphasizes the relationship between managers and employees. It also illustrates the systems and instrumentation used to support their relationship (i.e., shared knowledge, aptitude for performance management, and technology) as well as the context in which these various elements exist. Corporate culture encompasses the context for PFCs and developmental relationships, the employee and manager, the organizational climate, and the overall process of performance assessment. The following sections provide additional insight into the literature on corporate culture and the developmental relationships between managers and employees.

### **Manager-Employee Developmental Relationships**

The relationships that develop between managers and employees provide the context in which information is exchanged. Gentry and Sosik (2010) define a *developmental relationship* as a career-related mentorship that develops between a manager and an employee. PFCs constitute a part of this information exchange. Existing studies help illuminate the spectrum of developmental relationships.

Landry and Vandenberghe (2012) and Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) explored aspects of the manager-employee relationship that impact how each party thinks about, understands, and perceives the relationship and how it can impact their actions. Landry and Vandenberghe (2012) studied commitment mindsets of managers and employees. They found that supervisors with a positive commitment related to a great extent to employee positive commitments. Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) studied supervisor support within relationships with subordinates. Supervisors' perceived organizational support was positively related to their subordinates' perceived supervisor support (p. 693). These findings suggest that supervisors who feel their organization supports them are more likely to provide support in turn for their subordinates.

Zhao, Kessel, and Kratzer (2014) and Stringer (2007) researched the effectiveness of leader-member exchanges when experiences were perceived as positive or negative. Zhao et al. (2014) found that when there was a perceived "insider status" it significantly influenced the manager-employee relationship in a positive manner and encouraged employee creativity. Managers should be sensitive to the effects of their leadership practices on employees' self-categorization (Zhao et al., 2014, p. 180). Stringer (2007) found that when leaders and followers engage in positive or highly effective leader-member exchanges they share mutual trust and accomplish more, and overall group performance is enhanced. As the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship improves, the extrinsic needs of the employee are more likely to be fulfilled, thereby removing barriers to employee job satisfaction (Stringer, 2007).

Neves (2012) studied the impact of organizational cynicism and its spillover effects on the supervisor-employee relationship. Neves found evidence that

organizational cynicism interferes with performance. “These findings are relevant as they demonstrate how important organizational agents (in this case, the supervisors) are in the efforts to minimize, at least to some extent, the generalization of employees’ cynical beliefs concerning the organization to other domains” (Neves, 2012, p. 973). The role of leaders is pivotal not only in developmental relationships with employees, but also in how leaders channel the organization’s support for themselves.

Lapalme, Tremblay, and Simard (2009) researched the relationship between career plateauing, employee commitment, supervisor support, and the role of the organization. They found a significant relationship between two forms of plateauing and perceived supervisor support. First, hierarchical plateauing (vertical movement upward in an organization) is related to perceived organizational support. Employees who feel they are not progressing in their career promotionally are more likely to feel that the organization does not support them. Second, they found a mediating effect of perceived organizational support in the relationship between hierarchical plateauing and perceived supervisor support. An employee’s perception of how the organization supports them influences how they feel toward their supervisor in situations in which they have plateaued in their career.

Liao, Toya, Lepak, and Hong (2009) examined manager and employee perceptions of high-performance work systems (HPWS) in a service context. They found that perceptions differed significantly between managers and employees and also between individual employees, whether they had the same or different employee statuses. Employee perspectives of high-performing work teams are positively related to individual general service performance. This happens through employees (human capital)

and perceived organizational support. Employee perspectives of high-performing work teams were also positively related to individual knowledge. Management perspectives of HPWS were related to employee human capital and both types of service performance (individual and team). Overall, for the sites that were studied, knowledge in intensive service performance was positively associated with customer satisfaction with site service.

Way, Sturman, and Raab (2010) discovered that there was a weak connection between job satisfaction and job performance. Their study highlighted that group service climate had positive effect on supervisor ratings of group job performance behavior. In addition, they found that managers may improve their employees' job performance and satisfaction by ensuring that employees understand what is expected of them and how their performance will be appraised and rewarded by the organization. Managers should ensure that expectations are clarified and employees know how they will be appraised.

These studies provide further insight into developmental relationships between managers and employees. The manager's role is very important within organization and extremely influential within manager-employee relationships. The multifaceted nature of managerial jobs requires attentiveness, interpersonal skills, and the maturity to influence individual, group, and overall organizational performance.

### **Corporate Culture**

Corporate culture impacts organizational leaders and employees, as well as how work is conducted on a day-to-day basis. Several groups of studies have examined the landscape of service-oriented corporate culture and the overall linkages between supervisors, employees, the organization itself, and the quality of its customer service.



The first group of studies, by Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng, Tse (2007) and Ehrhart, Schneider, Witt, and Perry (2011), examined the impact of internal service and supervisory leadership on employee service quality. Hui et al. (2007) formulated a model to study and describe how service climate moderates the effects of supervisors' leadership behaviors. When the organization and working environment are not conducive to providing good service to colleagues and customers, supervisors' leadership behavior makes no substantive difference. Employee service quality was low when both the service climate and supervisor leadership were lacking. When service climate was unfavorable, effective leadership behavior played a compensatory role in maintaining performance standards toward external customers. These findings suggest that management should pay particular attention to employees' idiosyncratic experiences of the work system, which directly influence their level of human capital, psychological empowerment, perceived organizational support, and service performance (Hui et al., 2007).

In addition, when leadership was ineffective, a favorable service climate nullified the negative effect on service quality to internal customers. Ehrhart et al. (2011) explored employee perceptions of internal service quality and found that high quality internal service is necessary for frontline employees to yield superior customer service quality.

Internal service is likely to be particularly critical in service organizations, because external service delivery is dependent on the corporate information and tools at the disposal of the front-line workers who directly interact with customers. By providing superior internal service to unit employees, the management team of a service organization positions its retail units to maximize

the effects of the service climate created there. We found support for the moderating role of internal service when predicting customer reports of service quality. (p. 428)

Internal service climate is thus clearly linked to internal service expectations.

Auh, Menguc, Fisher, and Haddad (2011) and Dietz, Pugh, & Wiley (2004) researched the impact of employees on service quality based on perceptions and customer attitudes. Auh et al. (2011) explored the association between service employee's personality and the perceptions of the service climate. They found that when the service climate is perceived to be more positive, employees are conscientious, open to exploration, and overall more agreeable when interacting with others.

If retailers wish to compete based on superior customer service, developing a service climate is critical. Our findings suggest that hiring and promoting conscientious, open to experience, and agreeable employees can contribute to a more positive service climate. (p. 439)

Employee perception of service climate thereby has a positive relationship to customer satisfaction.

Dietz et al. (2004) explored service climate effects on customer attitudes and the boundaries that exist for service employees. The aim was to extend the theory of service climate by examining the boundary conditions for the effects of service climate on customer attitudes. Dietz et. al (2004) found that: (1) more closer and relevant the target of service climate to customers and (2) the higher the frequency of contact between employees and customers, the stronger the relationship between service climate and the attitudes displayed.

Kowalczyk and Pawlish (2002) and Dean (2004) researched organizational linkages with customer and branding and influences on external perceptions. Kowalczyk and Pawlish (2002) explored corporate branding through the external perception of internal culture, examining the relationship between outsiders' perceptions of organizational culture and corporate brand as measured by corporate reputation. They note:

while the primary effects of organizational culture are internal, in that the beliefs, knowledge, customs, and values are what bind organizations together, there may be a secondary effect of culture. This effect may be a branding phenomenon, in that the outside perception of culture may influence firm reputation. (p. 172)

Their findings suggest that the strategic resource of corporate brands may partially reflect external perceptions of the culture.

Dean (2004) studied links between the organization and customer variables in service delivery. Dean's study looked at service management from the various perspectives of marketing, operations, human resources, and psychological support between organization and customers. Dean (2004) found:

the service profit chain emphasizes a positive environment for employees which leads to "value" for customers, where value is a function of both quality and customer costs, and customer value leads to retention and profits. That is, satisfaction levels of employees and customers drive the successful service process, and customer perceived quality and value are antecedents of customer satisfaction. (p. 334)

Dean asserts that organizational characteristics and practices are linked to employee attitudes that are subsequently reflected in service quality outcomes, satisfaction, loyalty, and profit. These findings offer insight into corporate culture in the service industry, and specifically into the linkages between supervisors, employees, the organization, and the quality of customer service.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Research on the five managerial anchors presents compelling evidence emphasizing the centrality of the manager-employee relationship to the performance management process. The managerial anchors are:

- Congruency and the performance assessment system
- Bias avoidance
- Bolstering credibility
- Developmental aspects
- Delivery and accuracy

Each anchor was explored to more fully understand what is required for an effective managerial relationship in performance feedback dialogues. There are a variety of influences that impact the anchors and the range of tactics used to support the manager-employee relationships. The overarching themes of organizational culture and the developmental relationship between manager and employee were also explored in relation to the performance management process, to provide further insight into the environmental and interpersonal perspectives.

It is clear that research provides a vast number of empirically- and conceptually-based interventions for managers to enlist to support the performance management

process. In addition, the range of studies presented is a testament to the extensive and varied body of work existing in this field. This research provides practitioners with useful applications within organizations. The use of these managerial anchors should next be assessed in relation to the actual inner workings of organizations to evaluate their practicality within that context. In light of the presented model (see Figure 2), additional research would shed light on what behaviors or models provide sustained support for managers and their respective organizations in progressing toward strategic goals.

Amidst the plethora of research on performance management are the overarching themes of collaboration, communication, and good will in the assessment process. The manager role is complex and sensitive. The managers emotional, professional, psychological, and technical engagement in the process of assessment serves as a guide for employees. The literature also suggests that assessment can be more challenging in service-centric work environments. The cyclical assessment process is open for refinement and increased effectiveness as managers evolve in their abilities to evaluate and partner with employees. Managers should remember that each employee is unique; they must utilize their skills to mobilize and engage in PFCs and developmental relationships. In addition, managers serve as an anchor when guiding individuals and building developmental relationships with them for the betterment of the individual, the group, and the organization itself.

The gaps in the literature that exist are centered on two themes: sustainability and the process of managerial behavior change and awareness. The majority of the research regarding managerial anchors focuses on credibility in the performance assessment process, the role of coaching and development, and the sharing of information and ideas

with subordinates. The managerial anchors support and enhance the performance appraisal process for both participants. The added elements of service industry work environment and the manager-employee developmental relationship illuminate the complexities for managers to generate PFCs effectively and with quality.

The foundations of a traditional performance management process are evident in the literature review, but can vary depending on the intervention presented by the researchers. Though a significant amount of research exists in this field, it is nevertheless the case that: 1) managers continue to struggle with sustaining the necessary behavioral changes and skill enhancements to engage in high quality, effective feedback conversations; 2) the literature needs to be aggregated in a way that provides a comprehensive picture of performance management studies for more effective dissemination in the field; and 3) researchers need to explore the impacts of organizational context and culture related to manager and employee roles. Additional research is required to move the field in a more strategic direction.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Performance management (PM) is a defining process in which a company aligns its most important and valued assets to achieve strategic goals. This study explores the building blocks of performance management through effective PFCs and the developmental relationship between managers and employees. The strengths and opportunities shared by managers during these conversations are designed to advance the employee's development. The PFCs and developmental relationships benefit the employee, manager, group, and organization.

An action research (AR) team comprised of consultancy employees delivered interventions and I also conducted interviews with a separate set of managers and employees. Selecting methodologies that enabled me to work fluidly with the AR team and the organization was essential to my goal of observing and recording the “phenomenon of interest [and allowing it to] unfold naturally” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). The methodology of action research was used to facilitate the project team's process of discovery, piloting, and final implementation to further shape the client organization's PFCs.

Data were collected through five interventions, including a series of interviews. The five interventions were: (1) a guideline for managers on how to conduct PFCs and an online library; (2) a performance review “pop-up” self-assessment center (under the category of “Conducting periodic employee and manager events to support PFCs”); (3)

virtual internal resume sessions; (4) in-person and virtual individual development plan sessions; and (5) manager-employee interviews outside of the CF organization to explore PFCs and developmental relationships more deeply.

The AR team decided to develop a suggested guideline and online library to facilitate performance conversations between managers and employees. In doing so they hoped to increase the clarity of roles and responsibilities, foster ownership of the process, and provide suggestions for managers and employees. The second intervention was chosen because the data indicated that employees do not understand the value or have a basic understanding of self-assessments. Interventions three and four were chosen because the AT team believed that since it was a part of the company's PAS, it was worthwhile to take a holistic approach and include these approaches in our implementation plan. The fifth intervention, manager-employee interviews, were conducted to Table 3 illustrates the interventions at a glance that will be discussed in the following sections in greater detail.

Table 3

*Interventions and Implementation Plan at a Glance*

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>What is it?</b>	<b>Who did it involve?</b>	<b>When did it occur?</b>
<b>Intervention 1a:</b> <i>PFC Guide for Managers</i>	Managers use the guide provided with direct reports to test the usefulness.	All CF managers at the Savannah, GA site	August 2012-September 2012
<b>Intervention 1b:</b> <i>Online PFC Library</i>	Managers use the library to aid in PFCs with direct reports to test the usefulness.	All CF managers at the Savannah, GA site	August 2012-September 2012
<b>Intervention 2:</b> <i>Performance Review Self-Assessment Center</i>	Providing information and training regarding performance reviews.	All CF employees at the Savannah, GA site	April 2013
<b>Intervention 3:</b> <i>Virtual Internal Resume Sessions</i>	Providing information and training regarding	All CF employees at the Savannah, GA site	May 2013



<b>Intervention</b>	<b>What is it?</b>	<b>Who did it involve?</b>	<b>When did it occur?</b>
	internal resumes.		
<b>Intervention 4:</b> In-Person and Virtual Individual Development Plan Sessions	Providing information and training regarding development plans.	All CF employees at the Savannah, GA site	April 2013
<b>Intervention 5:</b> Manager-Employee Interviews	Exploring PFCs and manager-employee developmental relationships more deeply.	Non-CF organization Managers and Employees in Greystone	November 2012 February 2013 September – November 2013

The implementation of the PFC Guide for managers, the online library, and the performance review self-assessment center provided the Consultancy Department managers and employees with training as well as tools to facilitate effective PFCs. The interviews explored the developmental relationship between managers and employees. In addition, the study enabled me to draw conclusions about how managers, employees, and the relationships between them evolved either as a result of or in spite of PFCs. Understanding this evolution is critical to sustaining behavioral change for managers and employees and to supporting effective, productive, and collaborative manager-employee relationships and PFCs over time. This chapter will discuss the qualitative case study approach and the use of action research methodology, and will provide information on the client setting for the study, the process of data generation and analysis, and limitations of this methodology.

### **Case Study**

I chose a qualitative research approach because it allowed me to interact closely with the AR team, interview participants, and data. Qualitative research focuses on “understanding how people construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The AR team and I reviewed the data, developed the interventions, discussed barriers and benefits of the interventions, and implemented interventions. By providing an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009), the qualitative case study format offered the most effective way to document the organization’s response to the implemented recommendations. The overarching methodology of action research, applied in a qualitative case study, will provide rich data to answer the research questions posed.

### **Action Research**

Action research methodology was chosen for its ability to provide structure, continuity, and a collaborative environment for the participants and the researcher. Reason and Bradbury (2008) stated that action research is a “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 3). The utilization of this methodology enabled me to offer valuable contributions to the field of human resources and performance management and the client organization.

The core of action research requires the researcher to “look,” “think,” and “act” (Stringer, 2007). Several variations have emerged from this core methodology, including

“constructing,” “planning action,” “taking action,” and “evaluating action” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) and “planning,” “acting,” “observing,” and “reflecting” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1999). After reviewing various versions of the action research steps, I selected Ruona’s (2005) model as one that has been leveraged in an organizational context (a for-profit business setting) that best matched the client, Greystone, LLC (see Figure 3).

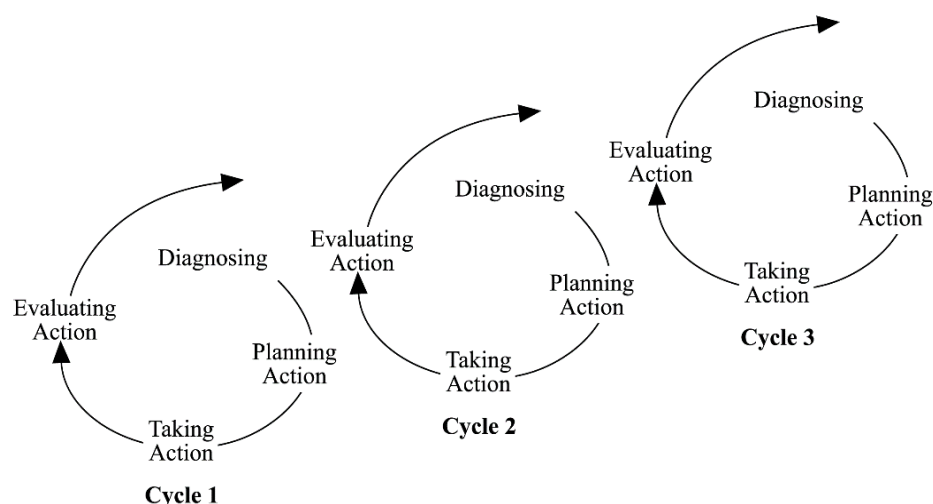


Figure 3. Coghlan and Brannick’s (2010) spiral of action research cycles.

This study follows the organizational consulting process, which represents an operationalized version of the action research steps. Ruona (2005) explained that organizational development (OD) consulting in action research is comprised of: (1) startup, (2) discovery, (3) feedback and dialogue, (4) design and action planning, (5) implementation, and (6) evaluation. *Startup* is a process in which the researcher and client work together to develop trust and create a contract outlining the relationship between the parties. When feedback and dialogue occur between the researcher and the client, the problems, strengths, and weaknesses of the organization becomes evident. During this process of discovery, the researcher and clients explored the gaps that exist

between the current and desired future states, identifying an avenue for reaching the client's goals.

Once a pathway is identified, the researcher and client together design a plan of action to address existing gaps and achieve the desired state. After implementation is completed, the researcher in collaboration with the client evaluates the action plan. The researcher reviews the outcomes of the action plan to identify what is needed to sustain the desired changes within the organization.

Herr and Anderson (2005) discussed how action research in the tradition of organizational development and workplace democracy has become more closely linked to language and communication (p. 13). The manner in which the researcher and the AR team speak and collaborate with one another provides a gateway to organizational development and workplace democracy. The research and decision making the AR team and I engaged in created a space in which AR team members could fully express themselves, and these conversations accelerated the team's momentum and progress. The benefits of action research are discussed in the following section.

### **Benefits of Action Research**

The contributions of action research not only impact those involved in the research process but also extend beyond the immediate client group. Utilizing action research enabled the AR team to learn about themselves and the organization, translate these lessons into valuable deliverables for the organization, and further enhance their knowledge of performance management. Action research demonstrates several strengths that solidify its value as a methodology: it aligns closely with organizational goals,

deeply connects constituents on varied levels for greater stakeholder buy-in, and develops meaningful interventions.

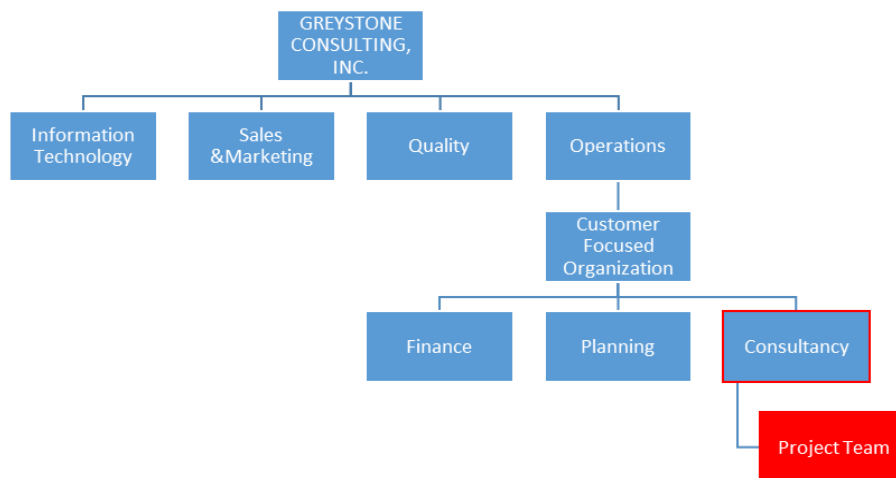
Herr and Anderson (2005) state that action research “produces knowledge that is not only fed back into the setting, but also contributes to the conversation taking place in the larger practitioner community, producing both local and community knowledge” (p. 111). This methodology provides organizations with practical solutions when considering how to support PFCs in an organizational context – solutions that can be shared with other organizations, the larger field of human resources organizational development (HROD), and those who study and engage in PM. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that actions research produces practical solutions by those closest to the challenge at hand. Helping the CF organization’s management team learn to facilitate more effective PFCs will enable them to create a better organization.

### **Description of Client Setting**

Greystone, LLC. is a large service firm with over 100,000 employees globally. This for-profit organization has been in the business services outsourcing and consulting industries for over 30 years. The major lines of business are divided into four areas: information technology, sales and marketing, quality, and operations. Under the umbrella of Operations, there are a plethora of products to assist businesses in maintaining optimal productivity.

The division within Operations in which this research will take place is the customer-focused organization. It encompasses three major departments: Finance, Planning, and Consultancy. This bounded case study focuses on the corporation’s Consultancy Department, the largest department of this customer-focused organization

with over 300 employees (see Figure 4). This group provides consultative services to clients regarding their purchased business outsourcing optimization products or services.



*Figure 4.* Organizational chart for Greystone Consulting, Inc.

### **Data Generation Strategy and Sources**

A two-pronged strategy was used to explore the research questions. First, the AR team reviewed company documents, including surveys, correspondence, exit interviews, presentations, and meeting notes. “Participants, especially primary stakeholders [of the research project], are consciously engaged in the process of describing the nature of the [research] problem that the study is exploring, and gathering information [data]” (Stringer, 2007, p. 65). The document review illuminated a need to improve the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees.

The second approach to data generation focused on a deep exploration of the manager-employee developmental relationship and PFCs, and the reciprocal impact of each. Over the course of 27 interviews (three interviews each with nine employee and manager participants), the researcher gathered data on the topics of giving and receiving career advice, learning, performance, and mentorship (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Data Generation Strategy*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Data Generation Completed</b>
<p>1. What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?</p> <p>2. What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?</p> <p>3. What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?</p>	<p>1. Formed a team of leaders and individual contributors across the Consultancy Department to explore PFC between managers and their employees</p> <p>2. Interviews with project stakeholders</p> <p>3. PFC guide for managers</p> <p>4. Online PFC library</p> <p>5. Company administered survey detailing success factors and barriers employees and managers experienced regarding PFCs</p> <p>6. Performance Review Self-Assessment Center</p> <p>7. Series of three interviews with three managers and six employees.</p>	<p>1. Field notes from meetings related to PFCs</p> <p>2. Field notes from stakeholder meetings</p> <p>3. Feedback gained from managers about the PFC guide</p> <p>4. Journal notes from a meeting with participants from the Performance Review Self-Assessment Center</p> <p>5. Journal notes from 53 team meetings</p> <p>6. Participant data from May/June 2013 Self-Assessment Center session</p> <p>7. Transcribed and coded nine interviews totaling 256 pages of data from the first set of interviews.</p> <p>8. Journal notes from each interview.</p> <p>9. Scheduled final interviews for each participant.</p> <p>10. Transcribed and coded 18 interviews.</p> <p>11. Journal notes from each interview.</p>

Stringer (2007) explained:

Interviews provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms. It is a reflective process that enables the interviewee to explore his or her experience in detail and to reveal the many features of that experience that have an effect on the issue investigated. The interview process not only provides a record of the participant's views and perspectives but also symbolically recognizes the legitimacy of their experience. (p. 69)

Through these strategies the AR team was able to evaluate data from the organization as well as assess the impact of the interventions. Additionally, I was able to analyze and compare the interviews to gain further insight into the manager-employee developmental relationship. Together these data sources helped to answer the three research questions being explored.

The two-pronged data strategy utilized three major sources of data: (1) the organization, (2) the AR team, and (3) participant interviews. Each offered a distinct perspective to help answer the research questions. The participants in the study held a range of positions in the department, from managers at various levels to front-line employees. Not all participants were continuously involved in the study; some made intermittent or one-time contributions.

### **Data from the Organization**

The AR team reviewed company documents that reported on earlier surveys and other previously collected data. The researcher also reviewed documents, recorded casual conversations, and noted other observations about the organization. The documents consisted of emails, presentations, meeting notes, exit interviews, aggregated engagement



survey data, and other surveys conducted by the Human Resources Department. The study participants who contributed to the data generated are profiled in Table 5.

Table 5

*Organizational Data Generation Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>
Anthony	Employee
Lakshmi	Manager
Kenneth	Manager
Gretchen	Manager
Shelby	Manager
Susan	Employee
Monica	Employee
Carol	Manager
Henry	Manager
Aaron	Manager

Merriam (2009) suggests that the analysis of documents can be highly subjective, in that the researcher alone selects what he or she considers important to include. The AR team worked in partnership with the organization's human resources team as well as with me when reviewing and analyzing the data to try to overcome this limitation.

**Data from the AR Team**

The data collected from the team was comprised of meeting notes, agendas, field notes, and informal conversations. Over time, the experiences of the AR team members provided valuable insights that helped answer the research questions. In addition, this data informed the interviews on the employee-manager developmental relationship. The AR team profile, including the duration of team membership, is outlined in Table 6.

Table 6

*AR Team Member Profiles*

Pseudonym	Position	Demographics	Duration of Membership	Years of Service at Greystone	Current Team Member
Aiden	Manager	White/Male	1.5 years	5.3	No
Ethan	Director	White/Male	1.5 years	6.8	No
Sophia	Manager	White/Female	1 year	5.3	No
James	Director	White/Male	2 months	1.0	No
Isabella	Manager	White/Female	2 years	11.2	Yes
Ava	Employee	Black/Female	1.5 years	4.1	No
Olivia	Employee	Black/Female	2 years	5.1	No
Grace	Employee	White/Female	2 years	5.3	Yes
Zoe	Employee	White/Female	1 year	5.5	No
Jacob	Employee	White/Male	0 years	<1.0	No
Lily	Employee	White/Female	1.5 years	<1.0	Yes
Mason	Employee	White/Male	1.5 years	2.0	Yes
Chloe	Employee	Hispanic/Female	1 year	1.0	Yes
Camila	Employee	White/Female	1 year	5.5	No
Taylor	Employee	Black/Female	1 year	4.1	No
Josie	Employee	White/Female	2 years	9.5	Yes
Crystal	Manager	White/Female	8 months	6.0	Yes

**Data from Interviews**

During the inception and development of the interventions, the AR team and researcher revisited in several conversations the roles of the manager and employee in the PFC process and their interactions beyond PFCs. After I discussed this theme with my committee and in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, we determined that exploring the manager-employee relationship further would bolster the model and complement the interventions implemented in the CF organization.

The manager-employee interviews explored the developmental relationship between managers and their employees in the context of PFCs. Gentry and Sosik (2010) define a *developmental relationship* as a career-related mentorship that develops between a manager and an employee. In the context of PFCs, this definition expands to

incorporate learning-, performance-, and career-related conversations. Developmental relationships between managers and employees have their roots in transformational approaches to leadership and mentoring (Gentry & Sosik, 2010). The interviews in this study elicit the subjective experiences of managers and employees engaged in such relationships, illuminating the ways these individuals understand and act upon the information discussed and the behaviors observed in the context of PFCs. PFCs are essential to shaping how employees perform their work and how managers offer feedback and guidance for their employees.

When planning the interviews, I spoke with each manager about the purpose, requirements, and duration of the study, and three managers agreed to participate with a minimum of one of their employees. The first interviews were conducted in November 2012, the second in January and February 2013, and the third in September and October 2013. A total of 27 interviews were conducted, with each of the nine participants completing three interviews.

The nine participants included three managers and six employees. The managers are all front line; all are in different departments and in some cases, different business units. One manager invited three employees to participate; a second manager asked two employees to participate; and the final manager asked one employee to participate. The employees did not know who else was participating and data were not shared with other participants (including managers). The participants were diverse in terms of tenure with the organization, ethnicity, gender, and education. Their average tenure with the client organization was seven years. The demographics of the interview participants are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

*Interviewee Profiles*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure at Greystone</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>
Cassandra	Manager	41	17 years	African American	Female	Bachelors
Jasmin	Manager	41	15 years	Asian	Female	Masters
Naomi	Manager	39	4 years	African American	Female	Bachelors
Peter	Employee	40	8 years	Caucasian	Male	Bachelors
Pranav	Employee	34	3 years	Asian	Male	Bachelors
Ann	Employee	30	5 years	Caucasian	Female	High school
Madison	Employee	56	13 years	Caucasian	Female	Associates
Samantha	Employee	42	10 years	African American	Female	2 years of college
Karen	Employee	49	9 years	African American	Female	Bachelors

**Sample size.** This portion of the study combined the methods of purposeful and snowball sampling. I contacted three local human resources directors outside the CF organization (within Greystone) to explain the study and request references for managers who might be interested in participating. The use of my professional network involved relying on work colleagues to recommend people who fit the criteria for the population identified for the study. Once possible participants are identified, the researcher can use snowball or network sampling to locate further participants (Roulston, 2010). Through my professional network, I received three recommendations for managers to contact.

Managers and their employees participated in the interviews, creating six “pairs.” The data collection process remained separate and confidential for each individual; each manager and employee were considered a pair only in the sense that I could compare the manager’s view to the employee’s. This helped provide a broader view of the PFCs and offered an avenue to validate information shared by both parties. The selection of

managers and employees was based on interest and availability. After potential participants were identified in conjunction with management and human resources, I invited each potential pair to participate in the study.

I scheduled a face-to-face meeting with each manager to explain the study further and answer any questions they had. The managers all agreed to participate and I asked them to provide the names of the employees who would be participating within two weeks. I offered to contact the employees to answer any questions, but they all said they felt comfortable answering employees' initial questions about the study. I received emails from each manager providing a total of six names of employee participants. One manager provided three names, another provided two, and the third provided one employee name.

**Interview preparation.** After receiving the names of the employees, I sent a follow-up email to all participants, detailing the study and providing my contact information. I informed them that they would receive a consent form (see Appendix A) they must complete in order to participate in the study, as well as a meeting request through Microsoft Outlook to set up the interview. Interviews are usually scheduled at the convenience of both the interviewer and interviewee (Roulston, 2010), and I tried to be flexible enough to accommodate the interviewees' schedules while managing my own work schedule. The consent form was previously approved by IRB and was therefore ready to be sent to the participants.

After sending the meeting invitations, I finalized the interview protocol (Appendix B) based on feedback from my major professor, fellow students, and dissertation committee, and from testing the interview questions with a professional in a different company. This valuable feedback enabled me to structure and order the

questions more appropriately. Maxwell (2005) explains, “The development of good interview (and observational) strategies requires creativity and insight, rather than mechanical conversion of the research questions into a guide or observation schedule, and depends fundamentally on how the interview questions and observational strategies will actually work in practice” (p. 92). Before each interview I checked to insure that the consent form had been completed through an online survey service, then I printed, signed, and dated it. All consent forms were completed before each interview.

**Data collection and interviews.** I conducted three interviews with each participant between November 2012 and October 2013. The interview is one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2009). These in-person interviews were semi-structured and lasted an average of 30 minutes each. Interviews were conducted face to face with all but two participants who worked remotely, and whose interviews were conducted by phone.

Though I had developed an interview protocol, I relied heavily on the information shared by interviewees to guide the line of questioning. Roulston (2005) explains, “interview guides provide the same starting point for each interview given that it assumes a common set of discussable topics – each interview will vary according to what was said by individual interviewees, and how each interviewer used follow-up questions to elicit further description” (p. 15). Leveraging and incorporating the information provided during the interview set a more conversational tone and allowed participants to share more context. Yin (2009) explained:

Throughout the interview process, the researcher has two jobs: a) to follow your own line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and b) to ask your

actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of your line of inquiry. (p. 106)

I used two recorders in each interview to guard against recorder malfunction.

Researchers must allow sufficient preparation time prior to the interview to check the recording devices (Roulston, 2010), and I ensured that both recorders were fully charged initially and checked periodically during the interviews to make sure they were still recording. After each interview I journaled about what the interviewees had shared, what I could improve upon the next time, my reflections as an interviewer, and my experiences with PFCs.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research requires a significant mental and physical investment when engaging with the data, the study participants, and the AR team. Patton (2002) describes this best through his phrase, “the researcher is the instrument” (p. 14). The following section will discuss the data analysis and trustworthiness for the organizational, AR team, and interview data.

#### **Analysis of the Organizational and AR Team Data**

The data from the organization and the AR team were analyzed by the researcher, AR team members, and project sponsors. Collectively, the AR team provided the project sponsors with an executive summary. The researcher conducted an after-action review (Tangient, 2012) and shared the analysis with team members. This included reviewing the implementation goals, defining our vision of success, determining how the goals were achieved, and identifying additional areas for improvement based on the interventions implemented. This process provided the project team with a collective view of their

perspective in order to best communicate results to the consultancy organization.

### **Trustworthiness of the Organizational and AR Team Data**

The trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability of the data were upheld in a variety of ways (see Table 8). Trustworthiness in qualitative studies is necessary but not sufficient for determining the reliability and validity of the data. Reliability was upheld by creating an audit trail and through the use of triangulation.

Table 8

#### *Trustworthiness of Analysis of the Interventions*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Application</b>
Credibility	Engagement in the Field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a researcher working in the field of HR and engaging with the client organization, I was able fully engage, reflect, and journal on the subject matter, organization, and profession.</li> </ul>
	Debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During and in between meetings with AR team members we discussed the progress of the interventions.</li> <li>Providing a feedback loop between the AR team and client sponsors.</li> </ul>
	Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The data was collected and analyzed on two levels, with a representative sample of participants and with the AR team members.</li> </ul>
Transferability	Thick Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journaling about my experiences working with the AR team.</li> </ul>
	Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as stated above.</li> </ul>
Reliability and dependability	Creating an Audit Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documenting the entire design, implementation, and evaluation process to enable replication and reviewing the process.</li> </ul>
	Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as stated above.</li> </ul>
Validity and confirmability	Practicing Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journaling about my experience regarding PFCs, my experience as a researcher, and thoughts after team interactions.</li> </ul>
	Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as above.</li> </ul>

I created an audit trail by documenting the entire design, implementation plan, and evaluation process to enable replication, and reviewing it at a meta-level for consistency and accuracy. The data was collected and analyzed on two levels to



triangulate: (1) with the AR team on a granular level, and (2) summary data was provided to the project sponsors from the client organization. This enabled all parties to “get as close as possible to data to [gain an] ‘understanding of a phenomenon’” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Validity was achieved through triangulation and researcher reflexivity. I practiced reflexivity by journaling about my experience regarding PFCs, my experience as a researcher, and my thoughts after team interactions. The process for triangulation is the same as previously discussed.

Credibility was achieved by engaging in the field and through triangulation and debriefing. Engaging in the data was natural for me because it is a part of the work I perform daily in my own job. I engaged equally closely with the client organization, ensuring that the data collected was shared with the AR team, employees in the organization and I journaled on my reflections about the process. The process for triangulation is the same as previously discussed. Maxwell (2005) explained that triangulation reduces the risk that one’s conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a single source or method, and allows researchers to obtain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues they are investigating. Debriefing occurred during and in between meetings with AR team members as we discussed the progress of the interventions. In addition, a constant feedback loop between the AR team and client sponsors ensured that the clients were kept up to date on the team’s progress.

Lastly, transferability was accomplished through triangulation and thick description. The process for triangulation is the same as previously discussed. Thick description was completed through journaling and reflecting on my experiences working with the AR team. Merriam (2009) reminds us that, “Qualitative researchers can never

capture an objective ‘truth’ or ‘reality’” (p. 215). This means the data collected may not be generalizable in all cases, but it can nevertheless capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied at a deeper level.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness of the Interviews**

After organizing the audio files and labeling each recording, I sent the recorded interviews to a third party to transcribe them. I listened to each recording, reviewed each transcript, and created tables of the interview questions asked and of the interviewees. It is valuable for interviewers to re-listen to audio recordings, especially if they are transcribed by others (Roulston, 2010, p. 105). This review enabled me to confirm that I covered all the questions in the protocol and to make note of new interview questions that emerged from the interview, which was a helpful practice in preparing for follow-up interviews. Because each interview was different, the process of reviewing the tapes contributed to the evolution of the interview questions as the interview process progressed.

After the interviews had concluded, I used HyperRESEARCH, a computer application used for qualitative studies, to code the interview data. Merriam (2009) notes that data management is no small aspect of analysis. A traditional code-and-retrieve process was completed initially using Microsoft Word and Excel, then subsequently with the assistance of HyperRESEARCH. The process for coding was both inductive and deductive. There were three rounds of coding. The first was performed manually for the first nine interviews. This was a long yet enlightening process that provided valuable insight into the data for the following rounds. Such data analysis is not easy, but can be made manageable if you are able to analyze along with the data collection (Merriam,

2009). This means that part of the analysis can take place as data is collected and reviewed, subsequently it may further assist the researcher in identifying the findings from the data once the collection phase is finalized.

The second round of coding utilized HyperRESEARCH to analyze all 27 interviews. Using this software significantly reduced the amount of time required to recode data and enabled me to look at the data from a meta level in order to gain insight into themes across the interviews. In addition, this software allowed me to dive deep into one or more interviews for a more detailed perspective. During the third and final round of recoding and organization using HyperRESEARCH, a final refinement of themes aligned with the research questions. This is when I re-coded some data under a more suitable theme and organized the data by research question. I used the codes frequency tool within HyperRESEARCH and the organizational significance of the data gathered (taking into account the culture and politics of Greystone) to assess and organize the data to answer the research questions.

**Trustworthiness of the data interpretation for the interviews.** The trustworthiness attributes, validity and reliability, were upheld by creating an audit trail, employing a code-recode strategy, and practicing reflexivity in Table 9. Reliability was achieved by creating an audit trail and using the code-recode strategy.

Table 9

*Trustworthiness of Analyzing the Interviews*

Strategy	Criteria	Application
Credibility	Member Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviewees reviewed each interview transcript for accuracy and provided feedback to the researcher if corrections were needed.</li> </ul>
Transferability	Thick Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tracking all interview questions and using interviewee feedback to improve upon questions for subsequent interviews.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Criteria	Application
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journaling about the interviews and my experiences.</li> </ul>
	Purposeful Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using referrals to start the management sample and utilizing snowballing for selecting direct reports (to the managers).</li> </ul>
Reliability and Dependability	Creating an Audit Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documenting the entire sampling, preparation, and interview process to enable replication and having the principal researcher review the process.</li> </ul>
	Code-Recode Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting three phases of coding interview data to refine the codes in light of the research questions.</li> </ul>
Validity and Confirmability	Practicing Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journaling about my experience regarding PFCs, my experience as a researcher, and the comments of the interviewees after each interview.</li> </ul>

I documented the entire sampling, preparation, and interview process to enable replication and had the principal researcher review the process. Three phases of coding interview data were conducted to refine the codes in light of the research questions.

Validity was upheld through the practice of reflexivity. *Reflexivity* refers to researchers' awareness of their own role in the production of knowledge and the construction of meaning in research (Roulston, 2010, p. 116). Credibility was attained through member checks, as interviewees reviewed each interview transcript for accuracy and provided feedback to the researcher if corrections were needed.

Lastly, transferability was achieved through purposeful sampling and thick description. I listened to and tracked the interview questions from the start and used participants' feedback to improve upon the questions for subsequent interviews. In addition, after each interview I journaled about my experiences and reflections. This study may be relevant to settings within other for-profit, technical, process-oriented businesses. While the cultures of organizations vary, basic talent management building blocks, such as PFCs and collaborative relationships between managers and employees, exist or are expected to exist within many businesses.

## **Summary**

Exploring PFCs and the manager-employee developmental relationship in Greystone Consulting, Inc. through action research and interviews provided a dynamic experience for AR team members, interviewees, and me. The methodology of action research offered both fluidity and rigor for the client organization and provided a means through which the AR team and I could test assumptions, make informed decisions, deliver and evaluate interventions, and collect data from the organization. The interviews complemented the AR team process by providing a point of comparison in investigating the topic of PFCs. The process of analyzing the data from organizational documents, the AR team, and the participant interviews employed a variety of strategies to uphold trustworthiness, credibility, and—to an extent—transferability. Overall, the framework for the study was complementary to Greystone's culture and my role as a researcher interacting with the organization.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE STUDY**

The exploration of PFCs and the manager-employee relationship in Greystone, leveraging action research, provided insight into the current challenges and strengths within the organization. This chapter will detail the context of the research study, the process of entry and contracting with the client, the team's formation, and the action research cycle implemented (overviewed in Table 10) to investigate the research questions. The cycle of AR will be shared to shed light on the process of constructing, planning, taking action, and evaluation.

The AR cycle consisted of working with the AR project team on ways to improve PFCs at Greystone. The purpose of the AR project was to explore the building blocks of effective and quality PFCs between managers and employees by exploring three research questions:

1. What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?
2. What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?
3. What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?

Table 10

*Key Research Steps for the Action Research Cycle*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Action Research Steps</b>	<b>Key Step in Research</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<p>What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constructing</li> <li>• Discussed current PFC challenges in the Formed a team of leaders and individual contributors across the Consultancy Department to explore PFC between managers and their employees with major stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Met with VP of the Consultancy Department to further discuss the challenges in the Consultancy Department regarding PFCs and the benefits of a project team.</li> <li>2. Communicated to the larger leadership team.</li> <li>3. Discussing and gaining approval of interviews with executive sponsors and benefit to the client.</li> <li>4. Discussing research topic with peers in Human Resources to obtain suggestions for managers interviewees.</li> <li>5. Drafting interview questions and consent forms.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher level of awareness of the importance of PFC'sPFCs.</li> <li>• Clarity on goals and milestones for the AR team.</li> <li>• Awareness of the AR process and case study report out format.</li> <li>• Approval from client site.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
<p>conversations?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used the constructed problem to develop a formalized plan of action.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reviewed and revised draft project charter.</li> <li>2. Reviewed company documents.</li> <li>3. Scheduling interviews with participants.</li> <li>4. Contacting the managers suggested and describing the goals of the research.</li> <li>5. Requesting that participating managers choose 2-3 of their employees to participate in the study.</li> <li>6. Finalizing the interviewee list.</li> <li>7. Piloting interview questions.</li> <li>8. Applying and gaining approval for an amended IRB.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of company data to build AR team's knowledge base.</li> <li>• Building AR team cohesion to achieve project charter milestones.</li> <li>• A list of managers to participate in interviews.</li> <li>• A final interview protocol.</li> <li>• Draft communication emails.</li> <li>• Robust data about opportunities for improvement and areas of strength from the participants.</li> <li>• Shared perspectives and learning from interventions</li> </ul>



Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
<p>What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking Action             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executed the five interventions developed to address the research problem.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Requesting the HR department to develop and administer a survey to gauge the effectiveness and quality of PFCs in the of Consultancy Department.</li> <li>2. Creating an executive summary for stakeholders outlining the survey results and recommended actions.</li> <li>3. Developing a schedule of events and interventions to address the research problem.</li> <li>4. Facilitating a Self-Assessment Center for of Consultancy Department employees.</li> <li>5. Developing an Online PFC library and PFC toolkit for managers.</li> <li>6. Conducting interviews with participants.</li> <li>7. Transcribing interviews.</li> <li>8. Providing transcribed interviews to participants for member checks.</li> <li>9. Analyzing and coding the interview data.</li> <li>10. Providing a verbal aggregate summary of findings for participants and client research sponsor.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing data based knowledge of the team to make informed decisions.</li> <li>• Providing forums for employees to learn and ask questions about performance assessments, development plans, and internal resumes.</li> <li>• Introduced a new way of engaging with employees by using blended communication methods.</li> <li>• AR team experiences attendance challenges.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating Action             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed and discussed the results of the actions taken.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a focus group with participants from the Self-Assessment Center.</li> <li>Conducted an after action review with the project team regarding the two interventions.</li> <li>Collected feedback from managers regarding the PFC toolkit and online library.</li> <li>Reviewed and analyzed transcripts of the interviews to assess the quality of the data and relevance to the research questions.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understood opportunities for improvement and areas of strength from participants.</li> <li>Shared perspectives and learning from interventions.</li> <li>Themes uncovered from data analysis conducted.</li> </ul>

Table 11 provides an overview, in chronological order, of the interventions and interviews that took place. These events may appear sequential (constructing, planning, taking action, and evaluation). However, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explain that when the process of action research occurs in real time there are events that overlap and happen in parallel.

Table 11

*Timeline of Events and Interventions*

Intervention Timeline	Interview Timeline	Audience	Timeframe
1. Pilot performance review assessment center (#2)		Employees	July/August 2012
2. Pilot PFC guide and online PFC library (#1a, 1b)		Managers	August/September 2012
	1. 1 <sup>st</sup> Manager-employee interviews	Managers and employees	November 2012
	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Manager-	Managers and	February 2013

Intervention Timeline	Interview Timeline	Audience	Timeframe
	employee interviews	employees	
3. In-person development plan center (#3)		Leaders	4/4/13
4. Virtual session on development plans (#3)		Employees	4/10/13
5. In-person development plan center (#3)		Employees	4/11/13
6. Virtual internal resume session (#4)		Employees and leaders	5/8/13 & 5/9 /13
7. In-person performance review self-assessment center (#2)		Employees	May 2013
8. Self-assessment virtual trainings (#2)		Employees <i>Note: Mandatory for Consultancy Department Employees</i>	5/30/13, 5/31/13, 6/5/13, 6/6/13
9. Virtual performance review self-assessment center (#2)		Employees	6/20/13
10. 3 <sup>rd</sup> manager-employee interviews	3.3 <sup>rd</sup> Manager-employee interviews	Managers and employees	September-November 2013
11. Evaluation of interventions with participants		Employees and leaders	October 2013
12. Evaluation		All	October 2013

### Pre-Step: Context and Purpose

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explain that the pre-step involves naming the general objective and the context of doing action research in an organization. This study took place within Greystone, Inc., a for-profit business in the professional services industry located in the southeastern U.S. It is a fast-paced, service-oriented work environment driven by client need. The AR team worked together to research, recommend, and implement the interventions.

The five major stakeholder groups (outlined in Table 12) for the action research project were: (1) the executive sponsors, (2) the consultancy organization management team, (3) the AR team, (4) the CF human resources team, and (5) each position within the

Consultancy Department. There were three executive sponsors: Joaquin Cruz, Elizabeth Brown, and James Brinkerhoff. Joaquin was the general manager for the customer-focused organization (CFO) and supported the study. Elizabeth, the Director of Human Resources, was also excited about the opportunity to have this study take place in the consultancy organization. Although she leads the Human Resources team supporting the CFO, Elizabeth was an advocate for proactive and meaningful FPCs between managers and employees. Lastly, James, the vice president of the consultancy organization, believed that employees at the lowest level of his organization are the critical building blocks. Before he and I met about the AR project, he was already challenging his managers to infuse work accountability into every role and to raise the level of understanding of the business. He welcomed the opportunity to sponsor the action research study within his organization.

Table 12

*Research Study Stakeholder Overview*

Major Stakeholder Groups	Roles and Responsibilities	Stake in the AR Project
<b>Executive Sponsors</b>	Drives the vision for the business unit. Sets guidelines to drive behavior. Requires infrequent communication of milestone achievements.	Increase employee engagement, decrease regrettable turnover, and improve productivity.
<b>Management</b>	Drives the vision for each department/function. Fund project implementation. Emphasize as a priority to GM. Set standard to drive behavior and support sustainable processes. Frequent communication of milestone achievements. Co-project sponsor. Communicate expectations to Consultancy management teams regarding the vision and mission of the department/function within their respective teams. Collaboratively	Improve productivity, increase engagement, and decrease regrettable turnover.

Major Stakeholder Groups	Roles and Responsibilities	Stake in the AR Project
<b>AR Team</b>	<p>facilitate the day-to-day operations of the department. Build awareness and support through the organization.</p> <p>Serves as a representative body of the consultancy organization. Assess the current state of the consultancy organization. Based on their experiences and reviewing data from the consultancy organization, develop interventions to address PFCs.</p>	<p>To improve the state of PFCs in the consultancy organization for overall improvement of PFC frequency and quality. Decrease employee relations situations.</p>
<b>CF HR Team</b>	<p>Supports the consultancy business and talent objectives through coaching and supporting leadership development; provides guidance in employee relations, and engagement. The HR team supports the leadership and AR team in their efforts to build PFC awareness by providing aggregated company data and education on related PFC processes.</p>	<p>To increase the frequency of PFCs and support managers and employees to be better partners in the PFCs.</p>
<b>Individual Contributors</b>	<p>Performs day-to-day activities with Greystone leaders to provide stellar customer service to clients. Participate in PFCs and developmental dialogues with leaders.</p>	<p>To experience improved PFCs with their managers and become an active partner in the conversation.</p>

Several leadership changes occurred during the study. Elizabeth continued to be an executive sponsor until she moved into a new role in another part of Greystone in the fall of 2012. James remained in the same role until winter of 2014. The CF organization welcomed a new senior vice president (SVP), George Nelson, in the winter of 2012. George was supportive and approved of the research, as the last SVP had, but neither was a key player in the ongoing activities of the AR team. The CF Human Resources team decreased in size over the course of the project (reduced from four to two people). This was the result of both job changes and resource management issues across the HR division. This impacted the study by increasing my workload and forcing me to become

more efficient with my time. The HR and AR teams were both focused on positively influencing and coaching leaders regarding the quality and frequency of PFCs.

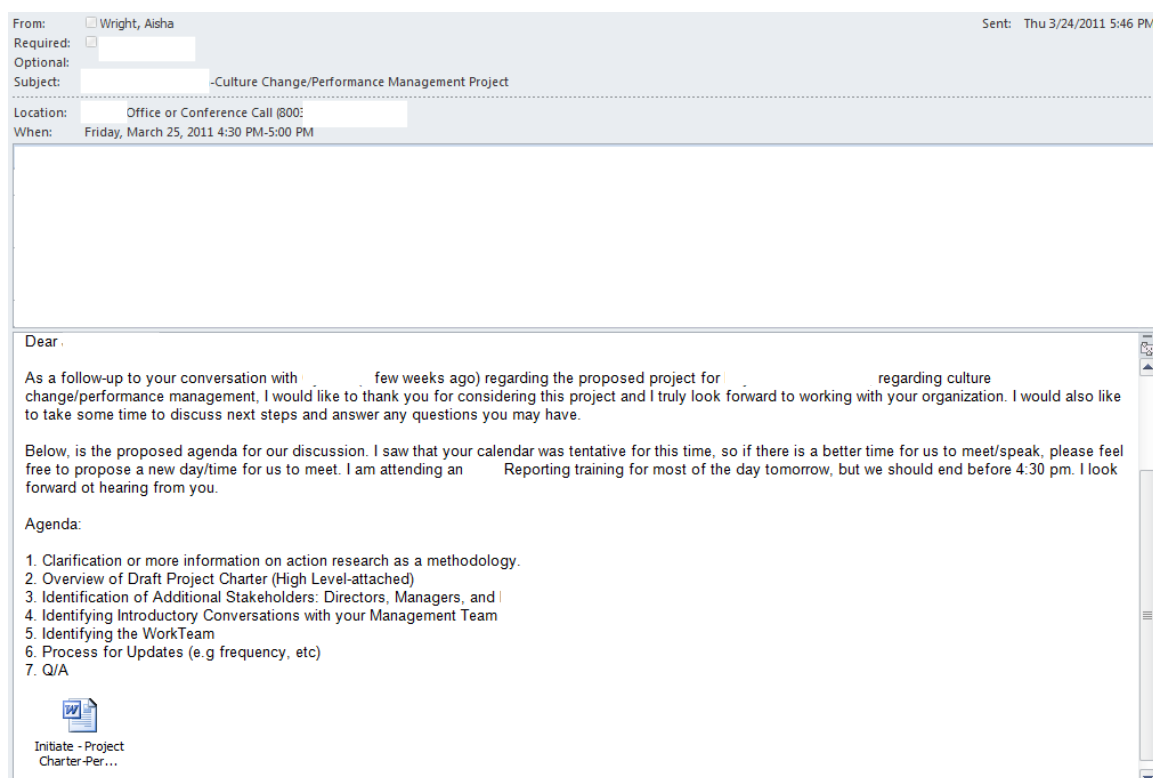
### **Entry**

The process of entry, contracting, and engagement progressed over a period of 8 months (May 2010-December 2010). I met with Elizabeth to provide an overview of the doctoral program, major milestones, and information about action research methodology. I subsequently had three major conversations, over a period of seven months, with Elizabeth regarding: (1) areas of interest, (2) the business need, and (3) action research as a methodology. The last meeting, in December 2010, concluded by agreeing to develop a project plan.

In February 2011, a project charter was proposed to Elizabeth detailing the timeline, deliverables, stakeholders, and evidence to support the presenting problem. During this discussion Elizabeth presented the idea of narrowing the focus of the study under a single director in the customer-focused organization (CFO). This suggestion created a manageable sample of consultancy employees and had the added benefit of providing direct feedback to one subset of the organization. Later the scope was changed to conduct the study under one vice president. It was decided that it would be better to broaden the scope since the outcomes would impact the entire CF organization. Therefore, the end goal would be for the AR team to develop interventions they could replicate in other groups to create momentum for change.

Following this meeting, Elizabeth met with James to introduce the idea of the study and lay the groundwork for a follow-up meeting between James and me. There were several contracting discussion with James up until May 2011 to clarify his

organization's needs regarding the proposed research questions, review the draft project plan, and discuss a high level framework for the study. After a rich dialogue, he was in agreement with: (1) focusing on the topic of PFCs between managers and employees, (2) having a project team in one site as an “incubator,” and (3) having the project team navigate the data and provide recommendations for the organization. In addition, we discussed potential participants and a communication plan. James and I agreed to include two employees in Seattle, Washington on the AR team so they could potentially replicate this project or provide deliverables at their location in the future.



*Figure 5.* Meeting invitation and follow-up to James regarding the AR project.

In conjunction with finalizing the project charter, I requested and received signed letters of support for the research from James and Elizabeth.

### **Expectations for Ongoing Interaction**

My role in the study included working with the AR team and supporting the co-team leads. I conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups, which also supported my role as an insider-researcher, to provide data to the work team in support of exploring the research questions. In terms of working with the sponsors, there were separate communication modes for the executive sponsor and sponsor. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) stated that stakeholders of a project engage in constructing what the issues are, however provisionally, as a working theme, on the basis of which action will be planned and taken (p. 9). Elizabeth was updated during our regular biweekly meetings. James was updated when milestones were completed. He was invited to a few project team meetings so he could witness the team's progress, but he did not attend. I communicated with the sponsors through e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face meetings.

When I met with James for the last time before the first team meetings, we discussed the differences between action research and traditional research, participants for the project team, co-team leads, and the strategy for my role as a researcher and coach for the AR team. We also discussed the importance of the study and its potential impact on the larger field of performance management and development. In addition, we spoke about the opportunity to explore asking for permission from the team to use the data for research (to be shared outside of Greystone), which James agreed to as well.



James conveyed that he would like to see preliminary deliverables in six months. The goals for the work team were to be able to develop impactful interventions that could be utilized by or modeled for other parts of the organization.

### **AR Team Formation**

The process of identifying a working group was collaborative and thoughtful. A tentative list of team members was developed with the project sponsor. The list of employees to approach included a director, three front-line managers, and four individual contributors. At the beginning of May 2011, I spoke with the managers of the potential team members, explaining the overall project. James shared his strategic vision for the consultancy organization, conveyed to his directors that their employees would be valued members of the team, and elicited the managers' thoughts regarding their employees' participation. After I spoke with the managers who agreed to allow their employees to join the project, the manager or I asked the employee if they would like to participate. After verbal confirmations of participation were received, I followed up with an email to confirm with each new team member.

Next, I followed up with two of the managers, new to the team, to explore their interest in being a team co-lead. After explaining the concept of having co-leads and a coach to facilitate the team and share the leadership responsibility, they accepted. This structure provided a learning opportunity for the managers as they worked in this triad format, which gave them the opportunity to work collaboratively with other leaders. The co-leads and I met regularly to schedule AR team meetings, determine agenda items, and discuss the progress of the team. The first planning meeting took place on June 9, 2011. The agenda and follow-up e-mail I sent after the meeting are presented in Figures 6 & 7.


			Agenda
<p align="center"><b>'Effective Performance Feedback'</b> <b>Team Meeting</b></p>			
DATE: June 9, 2011		TIME: 12:00 pm ET; 9:00 am PT	
LOCATION: Conference Call and F2F ( ) Floor		Conference Room, 1 <sup>st</sup>	REMOTE: 800. Participant code: Leader code:
<b>ATTENDEES</b>			
<b>AGENDA ITEM</b>		<b>FACILITATOR(S)</b>	
Introductions		• All	
Overview of Project		• All	
Review of Draft Project Charter		• All	
Discuss Addition of Team Members (Team Leads/ Specialists)		• All	
Determine Re-occurring Meeting Times		• All	
Wrap-Up/Action Items for Next Meeting			

Figure 6. June 9, 2011 AR team meeting agenda.

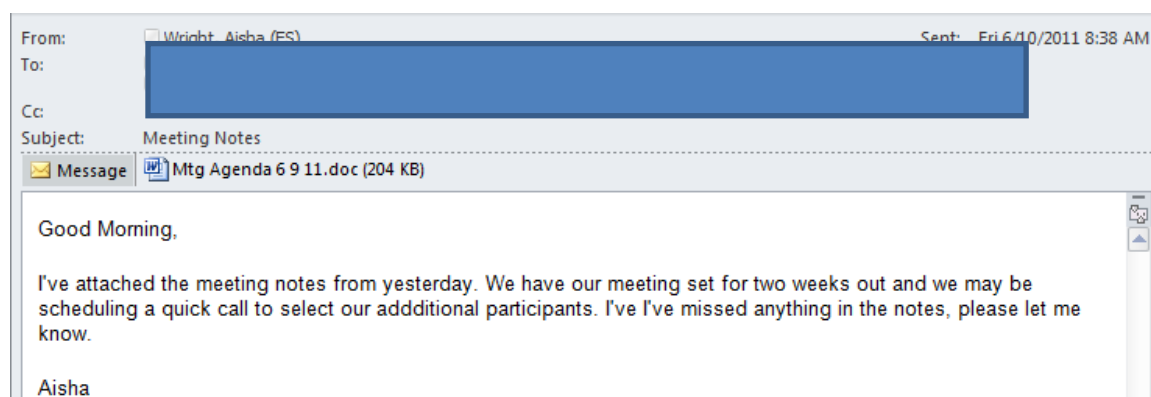


Figure 7. Follow-up e-mail to AR team members after first meeting held on June 9, 2011.

During this team meeting we discussed: (1) how to fill the remaining slots on the team that were designated for individual contributors, (2) the contents of the project charter, and (3) the frequency of future meetings. Over the course of the next two team meetings, this was the general agenda. The team decided it would be helpful to add

additional team members. To determine which employees would be added, the AR team requested a report from the CF HR team identifying the consultancy managers who had the highest and lowest employee survey scores for the questions related to the study's focus. Once the managers who fit these criteria were identified, the team contacted them to solicit volunteers who would be interested in joining the team. An email was then sent to the managers' employees soliciting volunteers.

Interested participants submitted a statement explaining why they wanted to join the team and what skills they could contribute. The team reviewed these statements and used a rating scale (1-5, with 5 being the highest rating) to determine which applicants the team wanted to meet with to make the final team selections. The team selected six new members and the first team meeting including the additional employees was held on July 22, 2011. Table 13 provides an overview of the AR team members.

The team of 14 was larger than expected, but the team thought having at least two representatives from each level of the organization would be important, since scheduling meetings and insuring that a quorum of members would attend was extremely difficult in the consultancy organization and the CFO overall. This contingency plan (having more people than necessary), they believed, would enable the team to continue to operate in the absence of some of its members. The group anticipated that an average of five to seven members would attend each meeting.

While selecting additional team members and engaging in other planning activities—such as developing team norms and ground rules and sharing responsibility in taking meeting notes—helped to build cohesiveness in the beginning, this cohesiveness later eroded during the project. On July 22, 2011, the team thought it would be important

to discuss ground rules and meeting frequency (Figure 8). The AR team decided at this time that they wanted to meet biweekly. They thought this would help eliminate assumptions across AR team members (understanding when they would meet and how they would conduct themselves as a team) and provide a foundation for the team to build upon.

Table 13

*AR Team Member Profiles*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Race/Gender</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Years of Member-ship</b>	<b>Years of Service at Greystone</b>	<b>Current Team Member</b>
Aiden	Manager	White/Male	AR Team Member	1.5 years	5.3	No
Ethan	Director	White/Male	AR Team Member	1.5 years	6.8	No
Sophia	Manager	White/Female	AR Team Member	1 year	5.3	No
James	Director	White/Male	AR Team Member	2 months	1.0	No
Isabella	Manager	White/Female	AR Team Member	2 years	11.2	Yes
Ava	Employee	Black/Female	AR Team Member	1.5 years	4.1	No
Olivia	Employee	Black/Female	AR Team Member	2 years	5.1	No
Grace	Employee	White/Female	AR Team Member	2 years	5.3	Yes
Zoe	Employee	White/Female	AR Team Member	1 year	5.5	No
Jacob	Employee	White/Male	AR Team Member	0	<1.0	No
Lily	Employee	White/Female	AR Team Member	1.5 years	<1.0	Yes
Mason	Employee	White/Male	AR Team Member	1.5 years	2.0	Yes
Chloe	Employee	Hispanic/Female	AR Team Member	1 year	1.0	Yes
Camila	Employee	White/Female	AR Team Member	1 year	5.5	No
Taylor	Employee	Black/Female	AR Team member	1 year	4.1	No
Josie	Employee	White/Female	AR Team Member	2 years	9.5	Yes

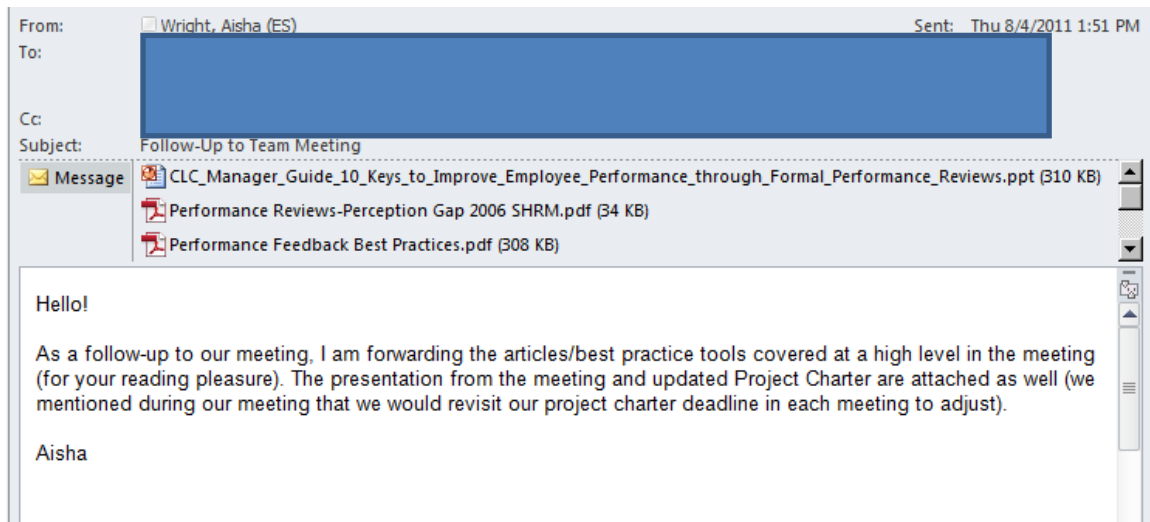
Pseudonym	Position	Race/Gender	Category	Years of Member-ship	Years of Service at Greystone	Current Team Member
Crystal	Manager	White/Female	AR Team Member	8 months	6.0	Yes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep and Open mind.</li> <li>• Keep things general (no names)</li> <li>• Confidentiality amongst team members.</li> <li>• Having productive conversations. Not productive to just say its not working. Be solution oriented. How can we make it different.</li> <li>• Understanding that we can table a topic for later, where applicable (parking lot-a person can raise their hand and ask to table a topic.)</li> <li>• You are responsible for catching up from the last meeting.</li> <li>• Be careful of using 'never' and 'always'.</li> <li>• If a vote occurs, those attending meeting make the final decision. Treat everyone as an equal.</li> <li>• Treat team members and their ideas with respect.</li> <li>• Be open to new ideas.</li> <li>• Try to understand all sides/perspective.</li> <li>• Be patient when listening to others speak and do not interrupt them.</li> <li>• Don't just say what you believe, but give the reasons why you believe it.</li> <li>• When others speak, ask questions if you don't understand their point of view.</li> <li>• Help the flow of discussion by using paraphrasing and by validating others' point of view when needed.</li> <li>• Try to examine facts and reasons, not just beliefs and opinions.</li> <li>• Examine assumptions instead of jumping to conclusions.</li> <li>• We respect one another so that we can work together as a team.</li> </ul>
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Figure 8. AR team norms/ground rules.

On August 4, 2011, we continued our discussion about ground rules with the new team members. In this meeting the team members introduced themselves and shared an interesting fact about themselves, and discussed their experiences regarding the strengths of and barriers to PFCs. During this discussion, the AR team members' "sharing" started to turn into a complaint session as they discussed their personal experiences, and we were running out of time in the scheduled meeting. I wanted to allow them to express themselves and share their experiences, but I knew it was going to take more time. I suggested that we table the topic for another meeting and everyone agreed.

I quickly saw that we needed more time and structure to make it a productive session focused on deeper understanding and potential solutions. The follow-up email to the AR team can be found in Figure 9.



*Figure 9.* Follow-up email to the August 4, 2011 AR team meeting.

When I reflected on the meeting, I thought it would be a good idea to facilitate a gallery walk exercise. This would support the AR team in (1) organizing their ideas, (2) promoting collaboration across the team, (3) encouraging the team to think holistically about challenges and strengths, and (4) setting the stage for my suggestion that they validate or refute their assumptions and experiences with the larger consultancy organization through further data collection. On August 31, 2011 we had an AR team meeting and facilitated a gallery walk (Figure 10). I created categories based on the barriers that were identified in the previous meeting. The team members were paired to work together to brainstorm solutions.

**Exercise**

- **Break out into small teams**
- **In your small group answer these questions:**
  - Are there any more barriers under this theme?
  - What solutions we do think will address these barriers?

*Time Allotment: 15 minutes*
- **Everyone walks around the room and takes a look at what each theme and use this opportunity to contribute any additional barriers or solutions**

*Time Allotted: 15 minutes*
- **Each group will have 5 minutes to report out to the entire group:**
  - Overview of the perceived barriers and possible solutions

*Time Allotment: 20 minutes*

*Figure 10.* Presentation slide from August 31, 2011 meeting when AR team participated in the gallery walk exercise.

On September 22, 2011, the AR team started to review the data from the gallery walk, company engagement survey, and other company documents. The team sought to support or refute their assumptions about PFCs based on their collective experiences and the data reviewed. There was a lot of discussion about what would be the most efficient way to test their assumptions, and the group agreed that a survey was the best way to gather additional data. The team partnered with the consultancy organization HR team to develop the survey covering essential PFC topics. During this time attendance at team meetings started to wane, due to employees' workload. Figure 11 shows an example.

From: [Redacted] Sent: Fri 10/7/2011 3:52 PM  
 To: Wright, Aisha (ES)  
 Cc:  
 Subject: RE: Team Meeting -Bring Your Lunch!

Hey, I am going to accept but please understand I am in training W-F next week. We do usually break for lunch from 12-1 so I should be ok to attend. If not I just wanted you to know why. This committee is important to me, we have just had so much going on lately with being out on sick leave.

**Upcoming out of Office**  
 Oct 6-8  
 Oct 10-12

*Figure 11.* Email from Zoe indicating her availability.

### **AR Cycle: Interventions Related to PFCs**

The following section will discuss the overall process of the AR team implementing the interventions designed to improve PFCs at Greystone. This will include the AR team's steps of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. This cycle of action research focused on the work with the AR team in the consultancy organization (see Table 14).

In addition to the four interventions the AR team conducted, I conducted a fifth intervention, interviews with employees and managers outside of the CF organization. These interviews focused on deeper exploration of the manager-employee developmental relationship, PFCs, and the reciprocal impact of each. Over the course of the interviews with these nine participants, my questions explored the topics of career advice, learning, performance, and mentorship (Appendix B). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) identify an action research cycle comprised of a pre-step (context and purpose) and four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. The process of action research occurs in real time (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In addition, reflection at the individual, team, and organizational levels will be discussed in light of the AR cycle.



Table 14

*Key Research Steps for the AR Cycle*

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
<p>What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constructing             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussed current PFC challenges in the Formed a team of leaders and individual contributors across the Consultancy Department to explore PFC between managers and their employees with major stakeholders.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met with VP of the Consultancy Department to further discuss challenges in this department regarding PFCs and the benefits of a project team.</li> <li>Communicated to the larger leadership team.</li> <li>Discussing and gaining approval of interviews with executive sponsors and benefit to the client.</li> <li>Discussing research topic with peers in Human Resources to obtain suggestions for managers interviewees.</li> <li>Drafting interview questions and consent forms.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher level of awareness of the importance of PFCs.</li> <li>Clarity on goals and milestones for the AR team.</li> <li>Awareness of the AR process and case study report out format.</li> <li>Approval from client site.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
<p>What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?</p> <p>What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used the constructed problem to develop a formalized plan of action.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reviewed and revised draft project charter.</li> <li>2. Reviewed company documents.</li> <li>3. Scheduling interviews with participants.</li> <li>4. Contacting the managers suggested and describing the goals of the research.</li> <li>5. Requesting that participating managers choose 2-3 of their employees to participate in the study.</li> <li>6. Finalizing the interviewee list.</li> <li>7. Piloting interview questions.</li> <li>8. Applying and gaining approval for an amended IRB.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of company data to build AR team's knowledge base.</li> <li>• Building AR team cohesion to achieve project charter milestones.</li> <li>• A list of managers to participate in interviews.</li> <li>• A final interview protocol.</li> <li>• Draft communication emails.</li> <li>• Robust data about opportunities for improvement and areas of strength from the participants.</li> <li>• Shared perspectives and learning from interventions</li> </ul>

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
<p>conversations and developmental relationships?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?</p> <p>What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking action               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executed the five interventions developed to address the research problem.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Requesting the HR department to develop and administer a survey to gauge the effectiveness and quality of PFCs in the of Consultancy Department.</li> <li>12. Creating an executive summary for stakeholders outlining the survey results and recommended actions.</li> <li>13. Developing a schedule of events and interventions to address the research problem.</li> <li>14. Facilitating a Self-Assessment Center for of Consultancy Department employees.</li> <li>15. Developing an Online PFC library and PFC toolkit for managers.</li> <li>16. Conducting interviews with participants.</li> <li>17. Transcribing interviews.</li> <li>18. Providing transcribed interviews to participants for member checks.</li> <li>19. Analyzing and coding the interview data.</li> <li>20. Providing a verbal aggregate summary of findings for participants and client research sponsor.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing data based knowledge of the team to make informed decisions.</li> <li>• Providing forums for employees to learn and ask questions about performance assessments, development plans, and internal resumes.</li> <li>• Introduced a new way of engaging with employees by using blended communication methods.</li> <li>• AR team experiences attendance challenges.</li> </ul>

Research Question	Action Research Steps	Key Step in Research	Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate action</li> <li>Reviewed and discuss the results of the actions taken.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a focus group with participants from the Self-Assessment Center.</li> <li>Conducted an after action review with the project team regarding the two interventions.</li> <li>Collected feedback from managers regarding the PFC toolkit and online library.</li> <li>Reviewed and analyzed transcripts of the interviews to assess the quality of the data and relevance to the research questions.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understood opportunities for improvement and areas of strength from participants.</li> <li>Shared perspectives and learning from interventions.</li> <li>Themes uncovered from data analysis conducted.</li> </ul>

### AR Cycle: Constructing

Constructing is the process of gathering and analyzing client data. Exploring the current and future state of the organization and the gaps that exist in between these helps develop an understanding of the context in which the research questions are situated. The research team reviewed company documents to assess the current state of the consultancy organization. These included a consultancy organization leadership needs assessment survey, the 2010 and 2011 employee engagement surveys, a team effectiveness survey, and other company documents. The research team identified the barriers to and opportunities for improving the consultancy organization. This provided a data landscape for understanding the context of the presenting problem and the culture of the CFO and consultancy organization.

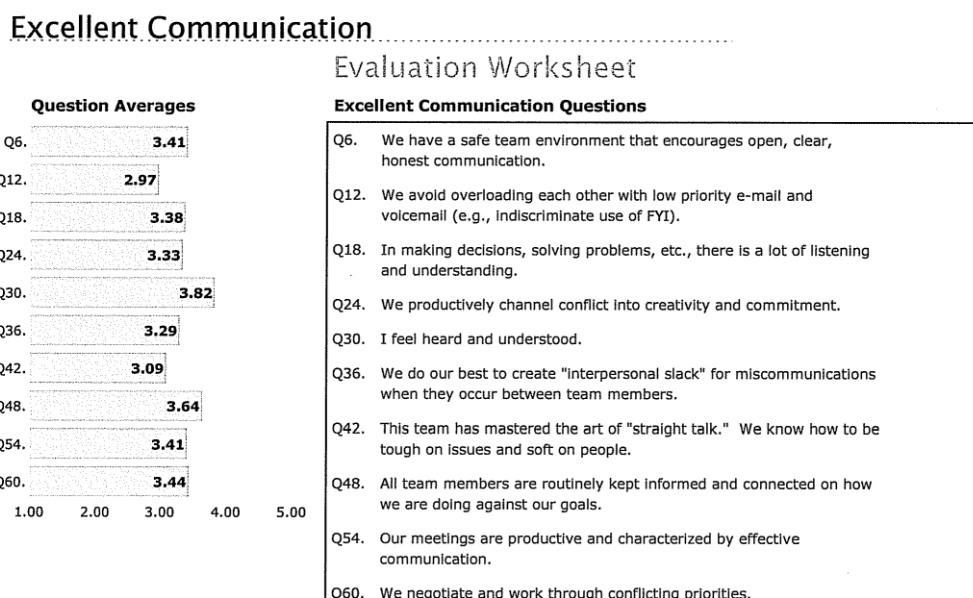
Two findings emerged from this process: (1) evidence suggested the consultancy management team had challenges communicating among themselves, impacting the larger organization, and (2) data also suggested that the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees could be improved. The AR team determined that it was best to explore the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees, and this became the focus of the action research project within Greystone.

The parallel processes of team formation and data discovery helped to develop a perspective of the current landscape within the consultancy organization. Stringer (2007) describes this as a time to “stimulate stakeholders’ interests and inspire them to invest time and energy” (p. 42). The combination of developing as the AR team and reviewing the data fueled the team’s energy and helped to fortify buy-in from team members. When the team went through the process of amassing company documents, they sought to diversify their resources by looking at survey results and anecdotal information from the experiences of the AR team members. According to Stringer (2007), “a variety of sources may provide information that further clarifies or extends understanding of the issue being investigated” (p. 68). The combination of building strong relationships among stakeholders and investigating organizational data provided a solid foundation for the action research study.

Four surveys, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and a collection of correspondence were examined. The correspondence consisted of emails, presentations, meeting notes, and exit interviews.

These documents provided insight into the Consultancy Organization's history and current state. This initial data collection served as a foundation for the needs assessment conducted by the HR team supporting the Consultancy Organization.

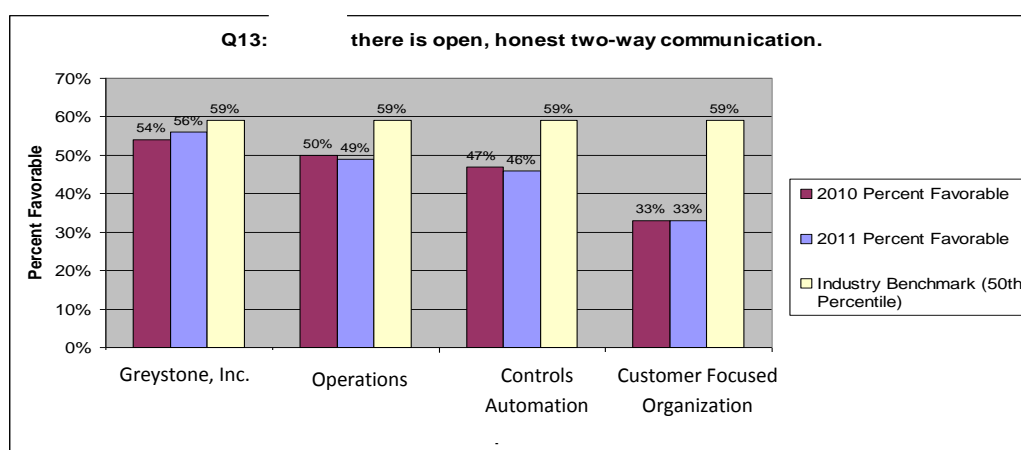
Two important themes emerged from the initial data collected: (1) engagement and (2) managers' talent development skill gaps. These themes were supported by the surveys, company documents, and journal notes collected. First, the theme of engagement conveyed the insufficient communication that characterized all levels of the organization. The results of the team effectiveness survey, which was administered to 45 managers and had over a 50% response rate, showed that leaders were perceived as not having a comfort level with honesty or conflict resolution. Average ratings on all 10 questions were below 4.00, and eight out of 10 questions received below a 3.5 average on the rating scale, with 5 being the highest rating (see Figure 12).



*Figure 12.* Questions and results from “Excellent Communication” portion of the team effectiveness survey.

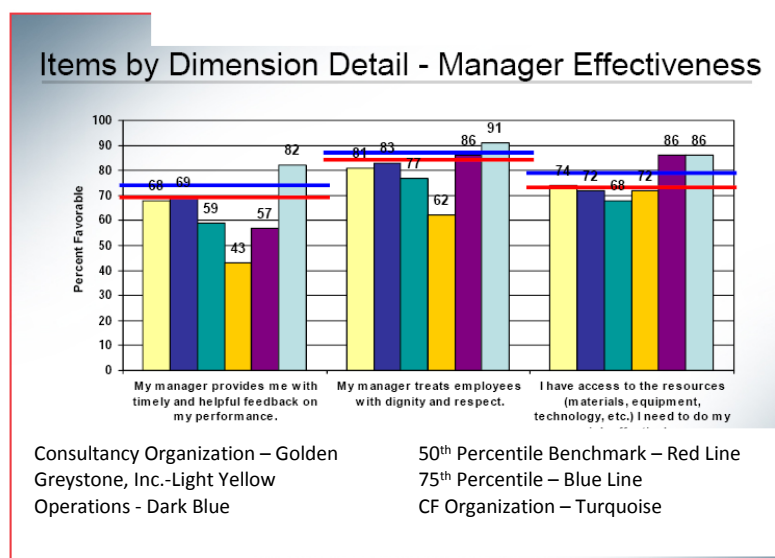
As a result of the survey findings and dialogue among the CF organization's leadership, the CF leadership team took action to improve communication between departments. The concern with communication is further underscored by the 2010 and 2011 employee engagement surveys (administered to all 300+ employees in the consultancy organization, with over a 70% response rate) in which an area of improvement was labeled "open and honest two-way communication." At Greystone, the CFO, and even at the lowest level of the organization, these scores were below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (the industry benchmark), as illustrated in Figure 13.

The needs analysis survey, one of the four surveys reviewed by the AR team, also supported the initial finding regarding the theme of insufficient communication. This is a theme that all six areas managers identified as an area critical to performing and developing in their role. The data suggested that managers were not having effective performance feedback conversations because they self-reported these areas of deficiency, especially coaching employees and performance management.



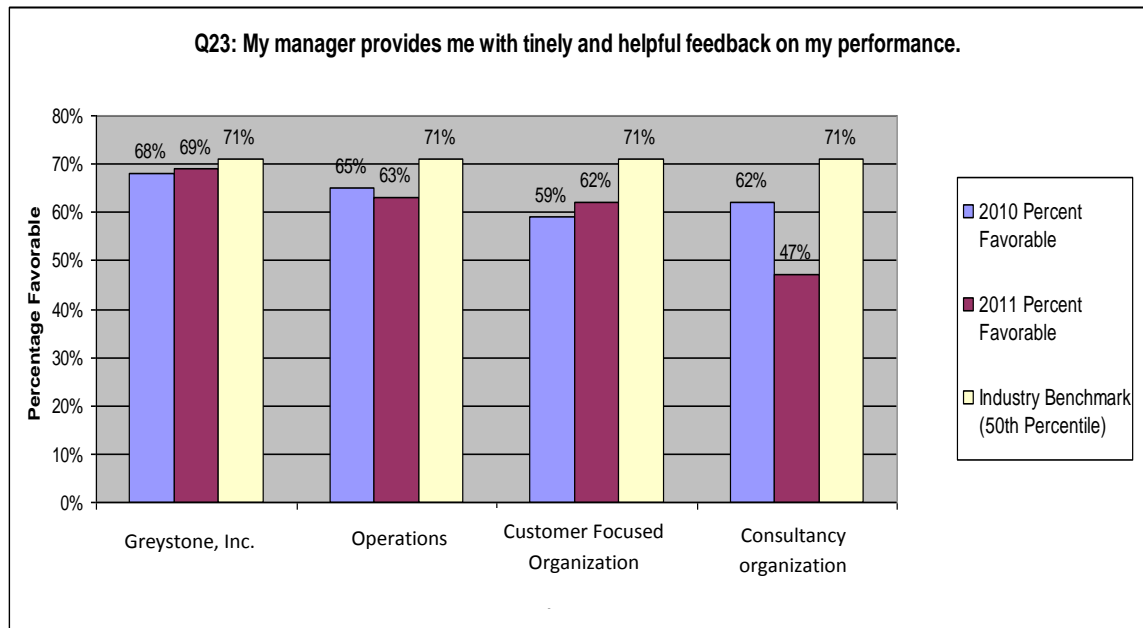
*Figure 13.* 2010 Consultancy organization employee engagement survey: Items by dimension detail—communication.

The theme of manager skill gaps can be described as the competencies or topics in which CF organization managers need further training and professional development. This was evident in the 2010 and 2011 employee engagement surveys, the needs analysis survey, and company documents collected. The results of the 2010 and 2011 employee engagement surveys revealed scores in the consultancy organization to be below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in the following areas: employee engagement, two-way communication (see Figure 13), timely feedback (see Figures 14 and 15), career management, and recognition. This highlighted that an environment that values communication as a priority in conducting business is not supported. There was evidence that managers are not providing timely and helpful feedback to employees regarding their performance.



*Figure 14.* 2010 Consultancy organization employee engagement survey: Items by dimension detail–manager effectiveness.





*Figure 15. 2010 Consultancy organization employee engagement survey: Items by dimension detail—manager effectiveness.*

The findings clearly indicated a need for managers to enhance their knowledge and skills related to the performance feedback dialogues. The needs analysis survey found that the six areas of greatest need in relation to leadership developmental (on a 1-5 scale, 5=greatest need) were: (1) managing development (score: 4.3), (2) employee engagement (score: 4.2), (3) coaching (score: 4.3), (4) employee development (score: 4.5), (5) managing and leading teams (score: 4.2), and (6) leading high-performing teams (score: 4.5). These were self-reported by managers (see Figure 16). The six highest scoring areas are directly related to the presenting problem. In addition, there was a high level of agreement among managers in the CF organization and the consultancy organization regarding the top areas to address. This suggests a widespread problem within the CF organization.

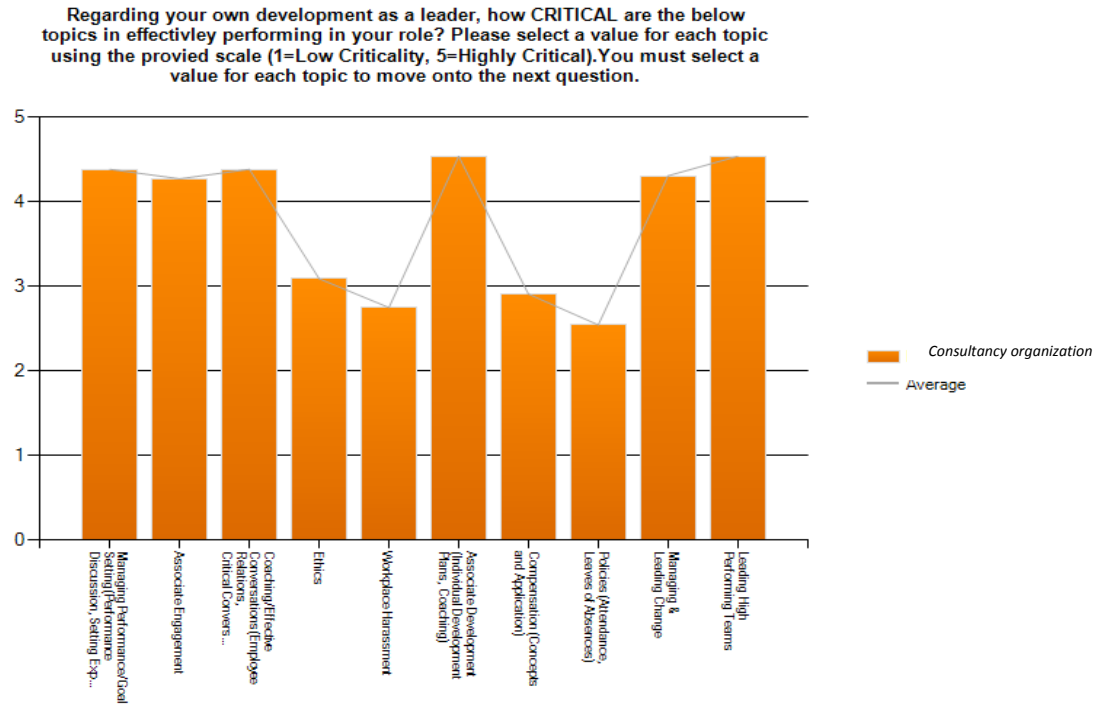


Figure 16. Consultancy organization managers' most critical leadership development needs.

The AR team also reviewed an email from a member of the consultancy management team. The email intended to provide a list of questions managers had about human resources topics. The email excerpts in Figure 17 show managers referring to “getting rid of bad employees” and having human resources staff, instead of managers, “manage the employee individual development plan (IDP) process.”

1. How to truly manage out bad employees versus allowing them to move to another team?
  - a. After we have determined that an employee cannot be developed why are we allowed to continue to place them on different teams? I do understand that there are situations where there are just personality clashes but if the employee has been on multiple teams and all managers are stating the employee is a bad performer then he/she should not be allowed to continue with the company.
2. HR Manages development plan process
  - a. Managers are asked to manage more teams and larger teams due to larger

- clients. The IDP process is very time consuming.
- b. HR can have a Development Manager that meets with employees to help them develop.
  - c. The presented a uniform source for all specialists in the business unit and eliminates managers that have team specific agendas that influence the IDP feedback.

*Figure 17.* Email excerpts from consultancy organization director: HR questions from consultancy organization managers.

This suggests that managers have a negative perception of employees who are underperforming and believe that developing employees is not part of their managerial duties.

The AR team reviewed a great deal of company data. In order to make sense of their experiences and the data reviewed, I asked the AR team how they thought they would test their assumptions. After some discussion, Isabella suggested, “We should do a survey.” The team thought this was a good idea, so we worked with the CF HR team to develop the survey. The CF HR team took the lead in administering the survey. The survey was approved by the sponsors and launched using SurveyMonkey® in November 2011 at the consultancy organization’s Savannah location. The Savannah location is one of three consultancy organization sites, and the one with the largest population within the Consultancy Department. The survey was administered to all CF specialists, managers, directors, and the VP, which totaled 209 people (see Appendix C).

The AR team’s process in arriving at the interventions they implemented was predicated on the data they collected. It is important to point out that the data collection, ending with the HR survey, served as a foundation for the executive summary and recommendations (Table 15), which presented the four interventions implemented.

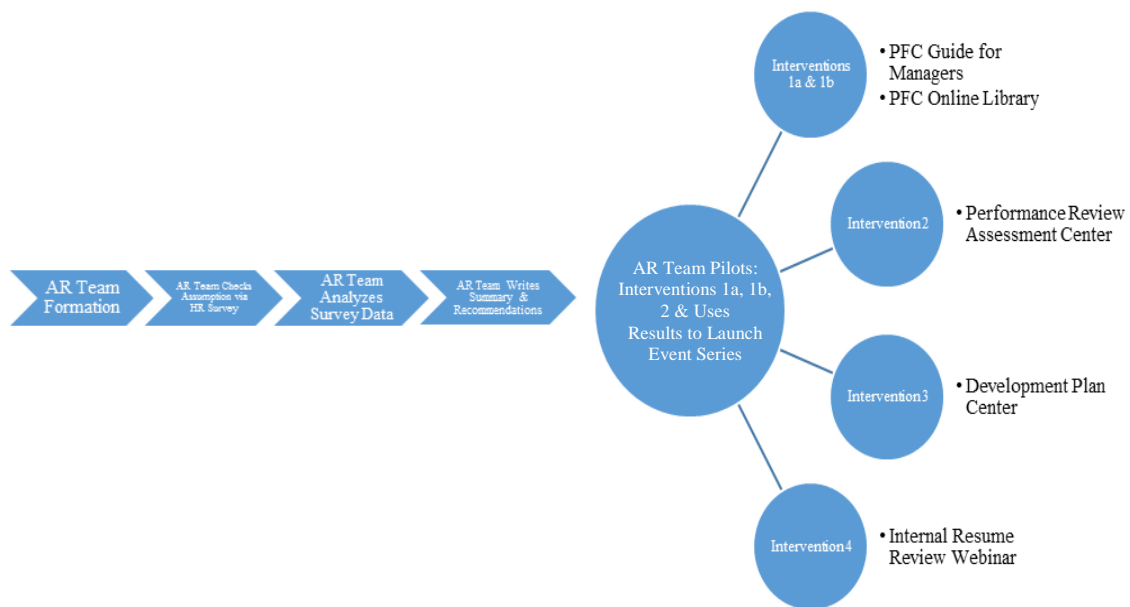
Table 15

*Recommendations from AR Team from Executive Summary*

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>What is it?</b>	<b>Short/ Medium/ Long Term</b>	<b>Who is involved/ impacted?</b>	<b>When will it occur?</b>
<i>Guidelines for Managers &amp; Online Library</i>	Pilot	Managers use the guide provided with direct reports to test the usefulness.	S	Two to three managers and their teams.	For 30 days during July-August 2012
	Rollout	Fully rollout the piloted and refined recommendation.	S	All leaders (including team leads) in Savannah	August 2012-September 2012
<i>Periodic Event: One-Stop-Shop Self-Assessment Center</i>	Pilot	Testing the usefulness of the information provided for refinement in event.	S	4-5 employees	One hour session during July 2012
	Rollout	Fully rollout the piloted and refined event to occur on a regular basis.	S	All employees in Savannah	August 2012-September 2012
<i>Refresher Training</i>	Rollout	Providing tools and information to existing and new leaders on performance feedback conversations and the structures in place to support them.	L	All leaders (including team leads) in Savannah	End of July 2012
<i>Retrofit tools and training for existing managers/employees</i>	Ongoing	Supporting a culture within the consultancy organization to understand the roles within the organization and the continuum of span give the variability by client.	M	All leaders (including team leads) in Savannah	Feb 2013
<i>Integrate recommendations into onboarding process/ new hire orientation</i>	Ongoing	Integrate related elements from the presented recommendations into onboarding for new employee and managers.	L	All employees in Savannah	Feb 2013

Figure 18 provides an overview of this process. AR cycles can happen in succession, all at once, or in an overlapping time frame. In the case of the AR team at Greystone, the

ideas for the interventions were “birthed” at once when developing the executive summary and recommendations. It was a comprehensive effort. It took the team a great deal of time to analyze the HR survey data. The survey was launched right before a peak working period, so the team reconvened in March to analyze the data and write the executive summary and recommendations.



*Figure 18.* Overview of AR team development of interventions.

As we wrote the executive summary and recommendations, the team took into consideration the new PAS system and its four distinctive parts: (1) performance goals, (2) development plans, (3) the internal resume, and (4) an online and in-person training database. Initially, as a team we thought we would focus on performance. However, based on the interconnectivity of these four aspects combined with the data the AR team and I reviewed, we decided it would be best to start with the four interventions selected.

One of the questions I was asked most often during the implementation of the new PAS was, “What is the difference between a development plan and goals?” After sharing the frequency of this question with the team, we agreed we should implement the session on development plans. The AR team then asked whether we should also move forward with a session on internal resumes, since that was part of the PAS. As we discussed this I shared with the team that when I conduct exit interviews, one process that is poorly understood by employees is the staffing process. Employees have told me:

- My manager blocked me from getting another job.
- I submitted my resume and I didn’t hear back; I must have been blocked. I was never contacted by a recruiter.

The group reflected on what they knew about the staffing and posting processes for transferring to new roles, which was a combination of misinformation and fact. There was definitely an opportunity to let employees know that recruiters don’t contact every candidate (even if they should) and that there are three key questions candidates are asked to determine whether they are eligible for a particular role. As we finalized the executive summary, participation continued to decrease among the AR team members.

During the inception, development, and implementation of the interventions, the AR team and researcher revisited in several conversations the roles of the manager and employee in the PFC process and how they interacted beyond PFCs. After discussing this theme with the principal researcher and my committee, we collaborated on how we could gain a deeper understanding of this relationship. The performance collaboration model from the literature review provided grounding for our discussion. We decided that exploring the manager-employee relationship further, through interviews, would bolster

the model and complement the interventions being implemented in the CF organization. We decided that the interviews would have to take place outside of the CF organization because of my position as the HR Manager in the CF organization. This would also enable me to compare and contrast manager-employee relationships in another part of the organization in a more intimate way.

The manager-employee interviews explored the developmental relationship between a manager and an employee in the context of PFCs. Gentry and Sosik (2010) define a *developmental relationship* in terms of the career-related mentorship that takes place in a manager-employee relationship. In the case of PFCs, this definition was expanded to include learning, performance, and career-related conversations. Developmental relationships between managers and employees have their roots in transformational leadership and mentoring (Gentry & Sosik, 2011). The interviews offered personal experiences related to how managers and employees understand and act upon information discussed, and the behaviors they observe, in the context of PFCs. PFCs are essential to shaping how employees perform their work and how managers facilitate feedback and offer guidance.

### **AR Cycle: Planning**

The AR team reviewed company documents that included aggregated survey results and correspondence (including emails, exit interviews, presentations, and meeting notes). This review uncovered a need to improve the quality and effectiveness of PFCs between managers and employees. The AR project team planned the timing of the interventions, taking a hiatus during the company's peak season (October 2012 to January 2013), and implemented four interventions.

During the last team meeting, I told the AR team that if anyone could not continue to be part of the team, to let me know so we could plan for replacements. The team had been meeting for some time and I wanted to be considerate of their time. In fall 2012, the team discussed the feedback from the piloted interventions to support PFCs and formulated a strategy for team members to work in pairs on the upcoming interventions. After the hiatus, several team members left the AR team as a result of their workload, conflicts of interest, or job changes. We attempted to recruit new participants and that helped to an extent; however, the workload and attendance were becoming challenges.

Utilizing the proposed stakeholder-approved team recommendations (see Table 15), the team implemented four interventions to further support awareness, understanding, and completion of development plans, internal resumes, and self-assessments.

Although internal resumes and development plans were not a part of the initial focus, the AR team decided they were important components of self-assessments and PFCs. This approach provided more avenues for employees and managers to interact and enhance work relationships. In addition, the AR team decided they would also open up the interventions to the entire CF organization, in order to promote and support manager-employee work relationships across the entire organization. The AR team was divided into sub-teams and each was responsible for organizing an event and scheduling meetings to plan logistics, set event dates, and manage communications.

When planning the interviews, referrals were received from fellow HR colleagues outside the CF organization. Three names of managers who might be interested in participating were obtained. The managers were contacted to set up a time



to explain the nature of the study, discuss confidentiality, and answer any questions they had about the study. An offer was made to speak with their supervisors to explain the study if that was necessary. Only one manager set up a time for us to speak with her director to make sure the director approved of her participation in the study. The other two managers indicated that they were comfortable talking with their supervisors.

The managers had few questions but were primarily interested in understanding what types of questions I would be asking. They also inquired whether all information shared would be confidential. I assured them that any information they conveyed would be confidential and that interview questions would be general and open-ended in nature. This would allow the interviewees to share their experiences more freely. I explained that while there might be a few set questions, their purpose would be to start a conversation about their PFC experience.

After speaking with each manager about the purpose of the study, requirements, and duration, three managers agreed to participate with a minimum of one of their employees. Each manager reached out to their employees, explaining the study and answering any questions, then provided me with the names of the participants. I followed up with a meeting invitation sent through Microsoft Outlook, a release form, and information about our process going forward. All participants submitted a signed release prior to their interview and I provided a copy of their release form with my signature as well.

Each interview was scheduled based on the interviewee's availability. Two interviewees worked from remote locations so our interviews were by phone. For one additional interviewee I had two phone interviews and a final in-person interview; the

remainder were in-person interviews. I also drafted, piloted, and finalized the interview protocol (Appendix A). The first interviews were conducted in November 2012, the second in January and February 2013, and the third in September and October 2013.

The nine participants include three managers and six employees. The managers are all front-line and all are in different departments, and in some cases different business units. One manager invited three employees to participate. Another manager asked two employees to participate. The last manager asked one employee to participate. The employees did not know who else was participating at a peer level, and data was not shared with other participants, including managers. There was a lot of diversity among the participants with regard to tenure with the company, age, ethnicity, gender, and education. The participants' average tenure was seven years with the company. The demographics of the interview participants are listed in Table 16.

Table 16

*Interviewee Profiles*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure at Greystone</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>
Cassandra	Manager	41	17 Years	African American	F	Bachelors
Jasmin	Manager	41	15 Years	Asian	F	Masters
Naomi	Manager	39	4 Years	African American	F	Bachelors
Peter	Employee	40	8 Years	Caucasian	M	Bachelors
Pranav	Employee	34	3 Years	Asian	M	Bachelors
Ann	Employee	30	5 Years	Caucasian	F	High school
Madison	Employee	56	13 Years	Caucasian	F	Associates
Samantha	Employee	42	10 Years	African American	F	2 Yrs. of College
Karen	Employee	49	9 Years	African American	F	Bachelors

## AR Cycle: Taking Action

The first and second interventions, the *PFC Guide for Managers* and *Online PFC library*, was implemented with the Consultancy Department management team after making revisions based on feedback from stakeholders and team members. The interventions were communicated and distributed twice to members of the Consultancy Department management team, starting in August 2012. It was initially sent to two Consultancy Department directors, with the intention that they would distribute it to the larger management team (40 managers and directors). Unfortunately, it was not sent out in a consistent manner. Figure 19 displays the email and meeting invitation I sent to leaders in October 2012. The leaders forgot to disseminate the information.

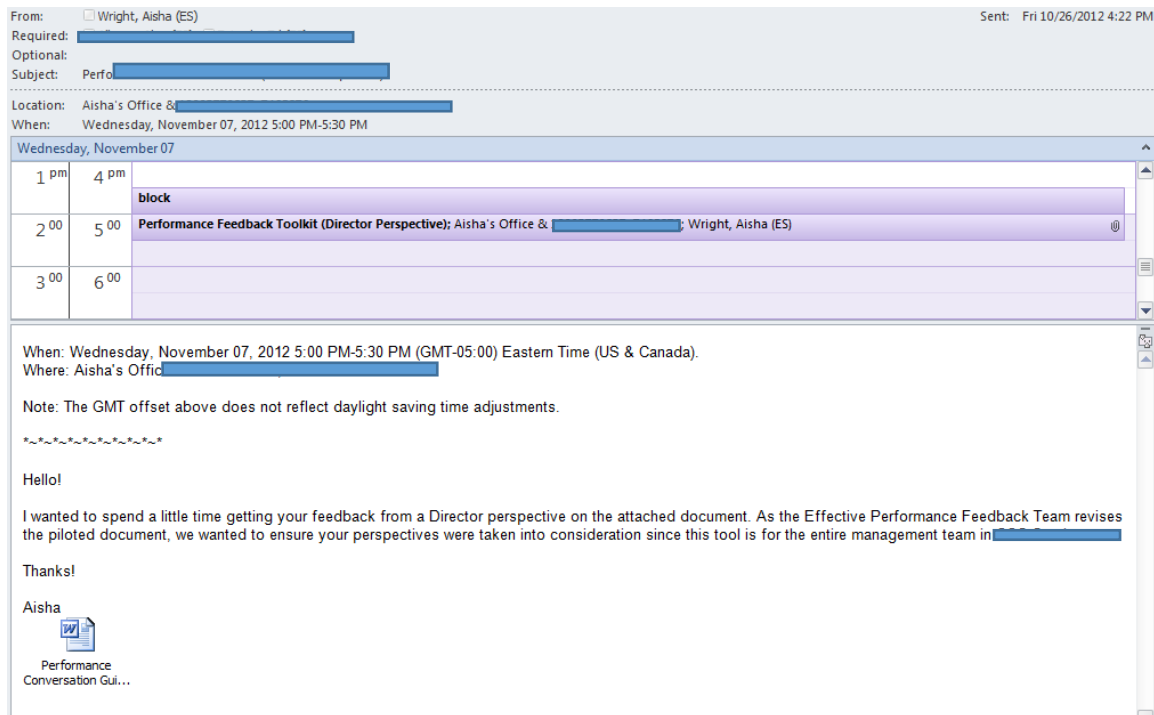


Figure 19. Original email and meeting invitation sent to two directors supporting dissemination of the *PFC Guide for Managers* and *Online PFC library*.

The issue was discovered during a weekly managers' meeting in February 2013. An HR team member was listening to a discussion among these managers about having one-on-one meetings with employees, and inquired whether they had received the *PFC Guide for Managers* and *Online PFC library*. The majority of managers in attendance responded that they had not received the document. Upon learning that the information had not been distributed as intended, I forwarded the information directly to the Consultancy Department managers and directors (Figure 20).

From: Wright, Aisha (ES)

Subject: Good Morning! High

US Service Leaders,

Back by popular demand.....I am forwarding the **Conversation Guide Toolkit**. This document includes tips and ideas on facilitating 1:1's as well.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to your Director, Paul or myself if you have any questions. In addition, if you all as a group think it would be helpful to facilitate a working session regarding this topic, please send me an email indicating:

- 1) you have an interest in a working session
- 2) and what specific aspects you would like to cover under the topic of performance conversations/1:1's

Have a great Thursday!

Aisha

Figure 20. Re-sent email with information on first intervention to consultancy leaders.

From: Wright, Aisha (ES) Sent: Fri 6/7/2013 10:17 AM

To: [Redacted]

Cc: [Redacted]

Subject: REMINDER: Recording of Developing A Quality Self-Review Booster Session & Upcoming Open Houses

Good Morning!

We've concluded the Booster Sessions on 'Developing Quality Self-Reviews'. A recording has been posted along with the job aids and presentation on: [People >](#) [Resources \(Look at the bottom of the page in the 'Associate Resource Library' folders\).](#)

We also look forward to seeing you in the open houses over the next two weeks! The format will be open Q&A based on the audience present. At times during the session, based on the audience's needs, the facilitators may walk through process related to Self-Reviews/Assessments or host an open forum for questions.

- **For** On **Thursday, June 13<sup>th</sup> from 1-5pm EST** there will be an Open House at the [Redacted] location to answer questions about Self- Reviews/Assessments.
  - o **Place:** Conference Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Tower B
  - o **Location:** [Redacted]
  - o You may bring your laptop to this event, but ensure you are already connected wirelessly. Please contact IT for assistance in gaining wireless access for your laptop.
- **For Remote Associates:** On **Wednesday, June 19<sup>th</sup> from 3-4:30pm EST** there will be a one and a half hour "drop in" session utilizing Live Meeting to answer questions about Self-Reviews/Assessments. There will be a recording made available on [my OurPeople >](#) after the sessions conclude.
  - o **Please register for this session using the following link:** <https://www.livemeeting.com/lrs/Registration.aspx?pageName=3fbm9zx37rktbgwk>

*Note: After registering, you will automatically receive an Outlook meeting request to add to your calendar including the live meeting and conferencing information.*

Please gain approval from your manager to attend. If you have questions, please contact Aisha Wright or Skye

Have a great weekend!

The Effective Performance Feedback Team & Friends

Figure 21. Follow-up email to consultancy organization about the Performance Review Self-Assessment Center.

The implementation was completed with the suggestions for improvement from two participants (out of 11 invited attendees) who joined the feedback session in fall 2012.

The participants' suggestions were categorized into three areas:

- **Communication:** Sending notifications to the entire CF organization, increasing the frequency of notifications, and finding alternative ways to disseminate information.
- **Information provided in the Performance Assessment Center:** Planning separate sessions for each part of the performance management system; requiring training for employees; and encouraging work on these items to occur throughout the course of the year, not just as an “event.”
- **Structure of the Performance Assessment Center:** Continue to have a mix of formal instruction and Q&A, management, HR, and onboarding representative facilitating, more frequent events and reserving a conference room to have the event.

The AR team incorporated this feedback into the rollout of the interventions to the Consultancy Department in the April, May, and June 2013 events (see Table 17).

The third intervention, the *Development Plan Center*, was held in virtual and in-person formats. Representatives from the AR team hosted the CFO employees and managers in separate sessions to answer their questions. This time allowed people to also work on their development plan. This was an important session to provide for the CFO because it supports PFCs and performance goals, and it comprised a component of the new PAS that employees needed to learn about.

The fourth intervention, the *Internal Resume Review Webinar*, focused on the internal resume portion of the new PAS. Since Greystone was encouraging every employee to have an internal resume, it was only natural to add this to the offerings from the AR team. The third and fourth interventions, the *Development Plan Center* and *Internal Resume Review Webinar*, had adequate participant turnouts and a high level of engagement from those who attended.

In my interviews with non-CF organization managers and employees, the participants were very candid in sharing their experiences. The nature of the interviews was respectful, professional, and powerful. In the first interviews I shared information about my professional and personal background, my degree, and the study itself. I thought beginning by sharing information about myself might help them feel more comfortable with me and encourage them to open up during the interviews. After introducing myself, I asked about their background, then moved into their experiences regarding learning, performance, mentoring, and career conversations (see Appendix B). I followed up most questions with an additional probing question to understand their examples more fully.

After each first interview I took some time to review the transcript, record which questions I asked and forgot to ask, and noted additional questions I wanted to ask in the subsequent interview. I created a grid to help organize myself when I conducted the second interview. When I conducted the interviews I wanted to keep them as conversational as possible, which can be difficult for a novice interviewer. The grid was very helpful for me in conducting future interviews and when I coded the data.

The second interviews were a follow up to the first interviews. During most of the interviews I had follow-up questions from the initial interview and I continued to use a protocol to keep myself on track. The third interview was also used as a follow up to experiences shared in the second interview. In addition, I inquired about their thoughts about the impact of their relationship with their manager on their performance, learning, mentorship, and career. I also asked what advice they would give to leaders about cultivating relationships with employees who directly report to them and impacts to PFCs.

### **AR Cycle: Evaluating Action**

The evaluation of the interventions helped the major stakeholders and AR team to determine how much value it had contributed to the Consultancy Organization and what changes would need to be made if the interventions were implemented more broadly at Greystone in the future. An overview of the implemented interventions and the results are outlined in Table 17.

Table 17

#### *Interventions and Results*

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Desired Outcome</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Intervention 1a:</b> <i>PFC Guide for Managers</i>	Managers use the guide and library provided with direct reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The five managers selected to participate in the pilot did not fully participate.</li> <li>• The pilot managers were interviewed to gather data about why they did not fully participant and all cited workload</li> </ul>

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Desired Outcome</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Intervention 1b:</b> <i>Online PFC Library</i>	to aid in PFCs.	<p>as a major barrier.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The PFC guide was provided to two Consultancy Department directors in that were employee engagement champions and it was not distributed consistently in the Consultancy Department (November 2012).</li> <li>• In a February 2013 Consultancy Department managers' meeting, when HR mentioned the guide, many managers said they had not received it. It was subsequently sent out again to the entire Consultancy Department leadership team.</li> <li>• Limited usage of the PFC Guide and incremental use of the Online PFC Library.</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention 2:</b> <i>Performance Review Self – Assessment Center</i>	Participants learn about how to write a self-assessment and its value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 22 employees (2%) attended (virtually or in person) when it was publicized to 800.</li> <li>• A total of 326 employees (40%) attended one of four virtual webinars. <i>Note: Attendance was mandatory for Consultancy Department employees.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Intervention 3:</b> <i>Development Plan Center</i>	Participants learn about how to write a development plan and its value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 115 employees (14%) attended (virtually or in person) when it was publicized to 800.</li> <li>• A total of 93 employees (13%) attended one virtual session and 22 (2%) attended two in-person sessions.</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention 4:</b> <i>Internal Resume Webinar</i>	Participants learn about how to complete their internal resume.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 107 employees (13%) attended two virtual sessions, which were publicized to 800.</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention 5:</b> <i>Manager-Employee Interviews</i>	Compare and contrast PFC experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% participation of three managers and six employees. A total of 27 interviews (three interviews each) were conducted over a year, producing robust data.</li> </ul>

The AR team provided a summary to the sponsors and used the team meetings to develop a plan to evaluate the interventions and identify our next steps. We reviewed the feedback received from managers and employees who participated in the interventions to determine what changes needed to be made to implement them on an ongoing basis.



The AR team also reflected on themselves as a team, examining their own process, communication, and feelings and considering what they did well and what could be improved. Below are some thoughts shared by AR team members during this meeting:

- Isabella – *I heard good things from my employees about the sessions.*
- Olivia – *I thought the self-assessment session was really good. I think it was helpful for a lot of people.*
- Lily – *I think we had a pretty good turnout . . . it's always so difficult to pull people away . . . I think we tried to make it as convenient as we could.*
- Crystal – *This worked just as good as it did in my last group. I think it's a good start, but attendance was low.*

The AR team representatives also had a discussion with the project sponsors. Following this meeting James said, “Those are good recommendations and I support you implementing them. Let me know how I can help.” The project team held a meeting to discuss what the implementation goals were, our vision of success if those goals were achieved, and what the team would seek to improve upon. This meta-level feedback will assist the team in holistically reflecting on the entire process from the perspective of the end-users and themselves as a team.

We believed there were opportunities to improve but thought the interventions were received well overall. Some of the opportunities to improve were: (1) offering more sessions, (2) making the self-assessment training mandatory for the CF organization, (3) continuing to offer all classes to the entire CF organization, and (3) when possible, offering separate sessions for managers and employees. An executive summary, which

included the results and ongoing work by the CF HR team, was sent to the team to conclude our work together.

In addition to the four AR team-led interventions, I conducted a total of 27 interviews with nine employees outside of the CF organization (three interviews with each interviewee) over the course of one year. After each interview I reviewed the transcript and send a copy to the interviewee. I asked them to review the transcript for accuracy and share any information they would like to change or add to the existing transcript. The data collected was rich and substantive in helping to answer the research questions for the study. Following data collection, I began coding the data to start the analysis process. After analyzing the data I went through several rounds of coding. Themes began to emerge to address and answer the research questions. An overview of the interview themes along with each participant's last interview transcript, thanking them for their participation was sent to each interviewee.

### **AR Cycle: Reflection**

The following section provides the individual, team, and organizational reflections regarding the AR team's work in the consultancy organization and, more broadly, within Greystone. The individual reflection focuses on my role as an insider-researcher and my thoughts, challenges, and strengths during the interviews. The discussion of the AR team's challenges and experiences will provide a backdrop for the study from their perspective. The interviewees' reflections offer their thoughts on what took place in relation to the interviews that were conducted within Greystone. The organizational reflection shares information about the company's culture, barriers, and receptiveness to the study.

**Individual reflection.** My role as a leader, coach, and insider-researcher has provided important learning experiences. While acting as a leader was uncomfortable at times because within the team I have very little positional power, it enabled me to become more agile in times of change and to collaborate more to gain consensus within the AR team. At times, I did a lot of work on behalf of the team to allow for team learning and balanced project work for the team as well as my regular job, to enable us to continue to achieve our milestones.

At times it was difficult to gauge how much I should do as a leader and whether I had too much invested in the success or momentum of the team, since the organization needed the team's work and I desired to have a successful team. My investment in the AR project was an element I had to manage so that I could help the AR team enough to stay on track, but not so much that I *became* the AR team. This became imbalanced many times during the project.

I have also learned to seek more input from those with whom I work to ensure that we are optimizing the best collective thinking of those involved in making decisions, brainstorming, or discussing a subject. As a leader, I have become more aware of my biases and the impact of my positionality. I leveraged tools such as journaling, mentors, and colleagues to support my objectivity from multiple vantage points when evaluating the interventions.

There was one moment I journaled about in August 2010 that helps describe these sentiments. It was after I met with the AR team, when I discussed the case study and doctoral research I was conducting related to our project.

I was worried when I explained to the team that the AR project would be a part of my doctoral research. I was concerned that they would not understand that it was not a selfish effort for me to finish my degree, but for the betterment of the organization as a whole. One team member asked if this was for a homework assignment; I felt deflated that they didn't see the benefit to the entire organization and reduced it to something that seems trivial. I explained how I hoped we'd work together, the role of my degree (that it's a backdrop), and the possible changes we could create in the organization by trying to enhance PFCs together. This provided clarity to the AR team.

I felt I would be able to prove this in how I positioned myself in my various roles for the team moving forward. I tried my best, with some success, to show my commitment to bettering the organization through my actions. When I spoke with the team I tried to keep a clear focus on the organization and what we could do to improve it. I was also conscious of my influence on the team. The AR team's deliverables can be integrated into the CF organization, which would allow me to further my development as a professional and a leader.

As an insider-researcher, I intimately understand the environment in which the AR team members work, and as a result I am sympathetic to their workload and priorities. For instance, the non-exempt team members think about work time in a different manner than exempt members, and they are able to earn overtime. When comparing the AR teams, I can honestly say that this team was not as productive as other teams I have led. Factors such as the business demands, time management challenges,

and the majority of the team having little project experience impacted our momentum.

Aiden, one of the co-leads, told me before our hiatus:

I won't be able to continue as co-lead any more. I will be pursuing a different line of work. I am working on getting my real estate license. Things just aren't working out here. I thought I would be promoted sooner and I am tired of waiting. In order to start my transition I need to move off of this project. I've already communicated to my director that I will be looking to do some new things.

In the role of coach, I provided support for the AR team and myself. The support I have created for myself is in the form of a coping mechanism, in which I maintain an optimistic view of the creation and implementation of the interventions. This view is based on my belief that this work can have a positive long-term impact on the CF organization. It helped me manage being the team lead, insider-researcher, HR manager, and coach for the team.

The support I created for the AR team was educational and consultative. As an educator, I shared performance management concepts, best practices from managers, and company practices with AR team members. As a consultant, I provided as objective a view as possible when assisting the team in thinking through and finalizing decisions. I also asked questions to elicit their thoughts about what would help the organization.

As a researcher, I continued to improve upon my ability to conduct fluid, conversational interviews. Reading the transcripts helped me to self-reflect and enhance my approach with interviewees. During some of the interviews I sounded a little stiff and nervous, but practicing the interview protocol and conducting mock interviews proved beneficial. In a few instances I was more concerned about the interviewee experience and

therefore strayed from the core questions. When I unintentionally missed some questions, I was able to revisit the missed questions in a follow-up interview.

I made a conscious effort to put participants at ease through my body language, eye contact, and the tone of my voice. After the second interviews, Karen and Madison gave me some unsolicited feedback, noting, “You are easy to talk to.” The interviewees also ended their interviews with hugs instead of handshakes. These moments validated my ability to create a safe environment for participant interviewees. I was also able to reflect on their own PFC experiences, which served as a reminder for me to be less judgmental and listen more in the research process and in my professional work. It also enabled me to be more aware of my relationship with my new manager. I have taken care to integrate my learning from the CF organization and from the interviewees to continue to be an active participant in the relationship I have been developing with my manager.

**Interviewee reflections.** The interviewees shared a great deal about their experiences, thoughts, perspectives, and opinions. Their openness provided rich data for delving deeply into the research questions. Their experiences helped shape the study in a very intimate way.

***Managers’ perspectives.*** All of the managers seemed very forthcoming; they gave no appearance of hesitation or discomfort in the interviews. Cassandra asked if it was appropriate to inquire whether there was any feedback from the interviews with her employees that would provide insight into becoming a better manager. I politely communicated that it would violate confidentiality to share that level of detail but praised her for her desire to refine her leadership skills. Surprisingly, Cassandra’s direct reports identified areas for her to improve upon, but also spoke very highly of her as a manager.

Overall, I had a positive experience with the managers.

***Employees' perspectives.*** The employees were a pleasure to interview, and overall these interviews went smoothly. Some interviewees provided more personal examples than others, but they all provided a great deal of detail that helped address the research questions. The managers and employees shared both positive and negative experiences during their careers, but on the whole their experiences in Greystone were positive. I reflected on whether this was an accurate depiction of the company relative to my exposure to PFCs. I had to remember that this was one small study of people who were not necessarily representative of the whole.

**Team reflection.** The team experienced intermittent attendance at meetings and eroding engagement among AR team members over the course of the study. Attendance progressively worsened after the first six months of meetings, due to competing priorities, heavy workloads, and the service-oriented culture of the organization. There was a core of engaged employees; however, I took on much of this work myself in order to keep the momentum going and not scare off those who remained involved, given that we had a smaller number of people to perform tasks.

The team recognized the need for improvement in the consultancy organization and in their own experiences, and demonstrated an awareness of the long-term impact of our work. The interventions may have impacted the increase in employee engagement

scores for the questions linked to our interventions, but that remains to be seen. The team did not have an opportunity to gather data before the end of the study to provide a definitive link.

Six months into the AR team's work, project team encountered three major challenges: (1) agreeing to a two-month hiatus because it was a peak time of year for the business, (2), managing inactive participants, and (3) wrestling with planning challenges. The two-month break was the longest break since the group began meeting in June 2011. The team had been successful in meeting their deadlines before this break, despite having fewer active team members and therefore more work for fewer people to accomplish. These deadlines included providing input to the CF HR team and creating and administering the HR survey in collaboration with that team, in order to test their assumptions and glean data to enable them to develop meaningful interventions.

The team also faced challenges with planning, though to their credit they were still able to achieve milestones and maximize the capacity of the team. They did so by dividing into smaller teams; working in pairs; and taking necessary breaks, specifically the two-month hiatus during the peak business season. Despite these mitigating methods, however, the team still struggled and much of the work fell on a few AR team members and mostly on me. At various points in time I felt like I was the only person working on the project. The business-to-consumer model was a major limitation and the action research study unquestionably suffered because of it. The client takes priority over everything else in this model; as a result, managers and employees have less time for professional development and managing people. Josie, Suzanne, and Olivia shared, "There isn't enough time in the day to take our client calls and do our regular work."



The team has had several inactive participants. Over the course of the study, of the 13 original members of the AR team, nine remained fully active; these participants are listed in Table 13. The reasons for other members' inactivity included non-attendance, medical conditions, workload, and employees transferring to other divisions. I initially sought to have individual conversations with the team members to encourage them to remain active. When the AR team found this was not sufficient, we decided that more employees should be added to the team. As a result, several managers were contacted to solicit two or three more people to join the team, to replace those who were no longer active and ensure representation across all roles within the consultancy organization. This helped in the short term, but we continued to have challenges with attendance and completing work.

**Organizational reflection.** Greystone was very interested in exploring the topic of PFCs. The recommendations for interventions were well received by the sponsoring organization and were implemented without any opposition. James understood from the outset the importance of the AR team's work and believed anything that would enhance PFCs, morale, and engagement scores would add value to the organization. The barriers that arose were based largely on Greystone's service orientation. This showed up in the poor attendance of team members at scheduled meetings and in the general lack of engagement among team members.

The organization was receptive to the interviews. Greystone as an organization has a service culture, which can be exhibited through a willingness to help one another. I have seen this not only in my study, but also when I have contacted people to ask for information; if they do not have the answer, they will suggest another employee to

contact. However, this service orientation can be a challenge when facilitating PFCs. Time becomes a crucial factor for managers and employees, and learning to strike a balance between the client and PFCs (along with other managerial duties) requires an ongoing negotiation. When managers and employees do not make time for PFCs, it negatively impacts their relationship. Time is constantly being renegotiated to serve the clients first and manage everything else secondarily. A service-oriented culture can therefore have both positive and negative effects on facilitating high quality, effective PFCs and cultivating manager-employee developmental relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, Greystone was a willing client throughout the course of the study. The exploration of PFCs and the manager-employee developmental relationship was beneficial to both the client and the study. The process entry and contracting with Greystone was easier due to my positionality as an insider-researcher; however, it also came with a great deal of challenge. The biggest challenges were time, the organization's service culture, and the workload balance.

The cycle of action research provided a distinct lens through which to view PFCs and the manager-employee developmental relationship in order to examine the research questions more fully. The manner in which the AR team implemented the four interventions and the interviews constructed the problem, planned, took action, and evaluated action them provided understanding over time. I conducted a fifth intervention, the interviews, which provided an insightful comparison to the AR team's work. This contributed to the learning of the participants, the organization, and me.

The service-oriented culture at Greystone presented a formidable challenge at the individual, team, and organizational levels. This culture unquestionably contributed to the decreased attendance and the shifting of work from the team to me. The reflections generated by the action research cycle provided details to tell the story of Greystone, the action research team, the interviewees, and me as a means of contributing to the field of performance management.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS**

Taking a step back and reviewing the data from the interviews and AR team interventions has provided important insights pertaining to PFCs and the developmental relationship between managers and employees. The current economic environment requires organizations to make difficult and decisive financial decisions that create a ongoing struggle to rebalance priorities. Companies have to produce profits by raising prices, attracting new customers, reducing headcount, improving efficiency, and undertaking other initiatives that lead to success in the marketplace.

The cycle of closely managing finances to control outcomes and re-prioritizing resources within a company creates a challenging work environment. Navigating and balancing priorities within corporate organizations is by no means an easy journey for the researcher, AR team, leaders, or other individual contributors. Two worlds collided in Greystone, Inc.: one of constraints and the other of balance.

The exploration of the current state performance management, the impact of the business environment (and the aforementioned realities of doing business) on PFCs, and the developmental relationship between managers and employees provided insights from those who work in this environment every day. The research questions that guided this investigation are:

1. What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?

2. What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?
3. What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?

**Research Question 1: What are the challenges and benefits of utilizing action research to design and implement a set of interventions to enhance and sustain performance feedback conversations and developmental relationships?**

Businesses operate to be profitable. They must maintain a delicate balance, acting internally to successfully manage employees, operations, marketing, sales, and infrastructure while making the financial decisions necessary to remain competitive in the marketplace. This is no easy task, because at any given time more attention and energy will be exerted in one area than in others. Every business must decide where to focus at any given time to reach their strategic goals. The manner in which action research is enacted within for-profit organizations that have strong hierarchical structures and organizational cultures can therefore be challenging.

Two of the overarching themes that greatly influenced the work of the AR team are power and organizational culture. These two themes were ever present and only as I reflected back on the AR process did I realize this. The AR team and I quickly established norms for our group. We expected absenteeism from the onset, we set an unrealistic expectation of meeting bi-weekly, and the way the team was formed created was an undercurrent that fueled the challenges of the team. The challenges we faced were a product of our organizational culture.

The AR team faced two related challenges: attendance and commitment. The attendance of the AR team progressively decreased, with participants citing an inability to maintain the time commitment to the group. The AR team also lost cohesiveness over time due to the need for training. However, there was one key benefit of using action research to design and implement interventions: team collaboration. Team collaboration was a significant factor that assisted in holding the team together. In the following sections I discuss the challenges and benefits of enacting action research to design and implement interventions within Greystone, Inc. Table 18 serves as a guide to the meta-findings, themes, and codes I identified.

Table 18

*Research Question 1 Meta-Findings, Themes, and Codes.*

Meta-Finding	Themes	Coding: 20000 AR Team
Challenge: To attend or not to attend—that is the question	1.Progressive decrease over time	21000 Attendance
		22000 Disagreements
	2.The impact of time	29000A Time-AR Team
		29000B Work Hours and Workload Hindrance
	3.Impact on AR team and interventions	23000 Interventions Impacting Increased Engagement Scores
Challenge: Losing team cohesion	4.Need for team training	25000 Moving too Fast
		26000 Need Basic Training
		27000 Need Basic Training—AR team
Benefit: One twinkle of hope	5.Team collaboration	24000 Leveraging Team Members
		29000 Organization Communication—Org Observations
		28000 Need Group Cohesiveness

**Challenge: To Attend or Not to Attend—That is the Question**

Participation in research team meetings is important for any AR project within a business setting. Team member engagement was critical to meeting the goals set forth by the team. Reason and Marshall (2006) explained that, “engagement may come in stages .

.. [and] . . . can occur early on in the process, arrive much later . . . or sometimes full engagement never happens” (p. 318). When team members do not adequately participate by attending meetings, working on tasks, and communicating with one another, it is a major hindrance to achieving project or study milestones. The AR team had significant challenges related to turnout at team meetings. This was a product of power and organizational culture.

**Progressive decrease over time.** The team’s attendance from June 2011 to November 2012 fluctuated significantly. When the AR team was formed they decided to add more team members than necessary as a preventative measure; however, attendance still averaged only 47% over 53 meetings. We had higher rates of attendance when we formalized the team in June 2011, when we finalized a survey with the CF HR team to launch at the end of October 2011, and when we evaluated the pilot interventions and finalized our plan for implementing the interventions in February 2012.

Attendance suffered for many reasons: (a) transfers to other parts of Greystone, (b) leaves of absence, (c) personal reasons, (d) no shows, (e) resignations, (f) manager-employee disagreements, and (g) workload. One individual who was supposed to be on the team never attended a meeting. Two other team members transferred to a different work group in Greystone. Aiden and Sophia, the co-leads, resigned from their positions and from the team; Aiden left for personal reasons and Sophia left because she was too overloaded with other priorities. Francine confided in me that she did not want to be part of the AR team any more because of an issue with her manager (who was also a team member) regarding work style, performance feedback, and many of the things we had been working collectively to change as a team in the CF and Consultancy Organizations.

The AR team expected absenteeism, and in retrospect this was not the best way to begin the project. The low attendance should have been an indicator to question whether the mission of the AR team really resonated with team members. The way the team was formed may also have been a possible driver of this problem. The AR team members were a mix of appointed members and volunteers. This could have further complicated the progress of the AR team because it was not comprised entirely of volunteers with a passion for the subject.

Power and position played a significant role in the study. Influences included James, my manager, and the overall organizational culture. While meeting with the team I felt the need to keep things status quo, follow organizational norms, and not “rock the boat” too much (when it came to suggesting ideas). This was not the result of anything I was told, but rather a result of my empathy for my team members’ workloads and my gratitude toward Greystone for supporting the research. I was grateful I had team members at all, and I didn’t want to push the team or the organization too much. Within the team, there were team leaders, managers, and one director. While it was good to have representation from all levels of the organization, it might have been to the detriment of the team to have so many leaders participating, or even to have any at all. In retrospect, the team members might not have viewed one another as equal team members (because of the role of managerial power and hierarchy that existed in the Consultancy Organization).

At one point, the sole director on the team sent an email to team members after witnessing AR team participants not consistently coming to meetings. He took it upon himself to email the AR team members to encourage them to attend. At the time it was



refreshing to read that email and know that someone else felt the way I did. He wrote to me,

I will send a follow-up email to strongly “encourage” participation in our next team meeting. I am disappointed in the low turnout today so I will use a follow-up email to push participation harder so that we can get to the end of the job. In fact, I think it may be a good idea for me to set up the next call to review the document as a team. What are your thoughts? (Personal correspondence, 2011)

Looking back, when the director used his power and position to try to motivate the team it actually had a negative effect; attendance did not improve and in fact got worse. AR team members needed to participate on their own volition, not because someone told them to.

On a number of occasions we had only three to five AR team members participating in team meetings. In an effort to attract more people to attend, I tried having a mix of people on the phone and in the room and I tried conducting only conference calls. The thought process behind the conference call was that it would be easier for people to attend. Neither of these options improved the attendance rate. It was difficult trying to manage meeting participants who were both remote and onsite to have a collaborative experience. For example, after one meeting, I noted in my journal,

Two team members were on the phone and Taylor came on time and Aiden was late (just as we were hanging up). Someone else sent a message before the call to let us know they would be late, but the momentum had already died. So we agreed we would send a message out to everyone to review for the next meeting before we can finalize. (Journal notes, 2011)

The two co-leads were supposed to serve as backups for one another when leading the team. Additionally, I would support them in a coaching capacity. This way we had three people who could possibly step into leading the team at any time. This framework was successful for the first few months after the AR team was formed. However, the attendance of one of the co-leads diminished and responsibilities fell on the remaining co-lead, Aiden, and myself. Then Aiden told me he was resigning from the team and was looking to change careers. I vented in my journal,

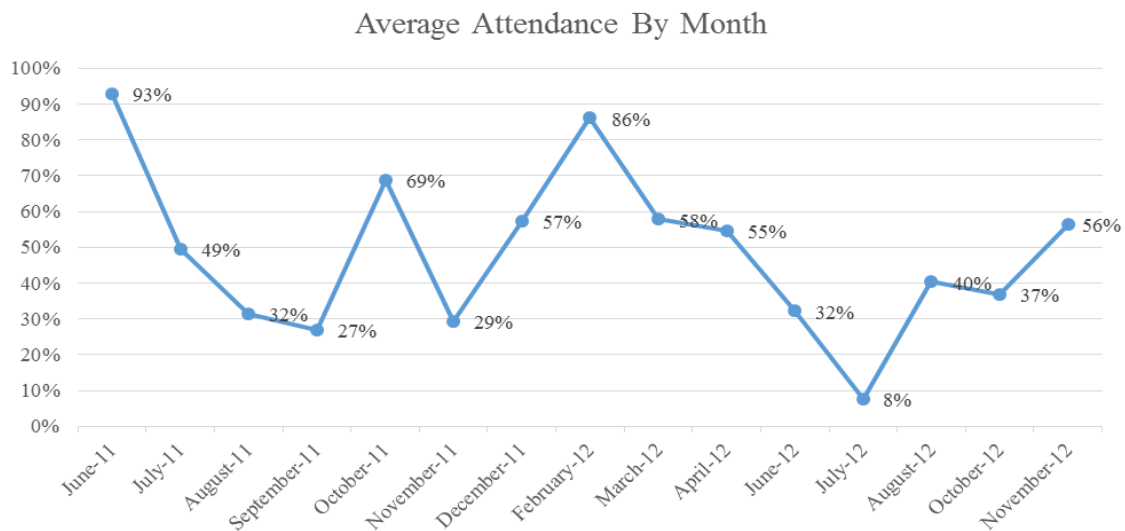
It's really frustrating when the co-team leads bail at the last minute. Is this really important to them? Do they really care? I know I have to try and stay calm, but it is really disheartening. I know they are juggling a lot of things. But it just seems like they are trying to slap things together and not think things through. Both of them emailed me within one hour of our pre-scheduled prep meeting to cancel. Sophia even said she wouldn't be able to come to the meeting because of a client visit and she said she felt like she wasn't up to speed. I wanted to tell her that it was her responsibility to get caught up! (Journal notes, 2011)

The number of meetings that took place over the course of the study was impressive; however, the AR team suffered from inconsistent attendance throughout (Figure 22). Co-leads or team members did not show up to meetings, with or without prior notification. The team appeared not to be a priority for them, reflecting my lack of influence with the co-leads.

I should have been more aggressive with the co-leads. When Tanya (the director) left me the voicemail about Sophia, explaining that she wouldn't be able to participate any more because of her workload, I should have tried to call her back

and understand her perspective more and try to find a win-win situation for both of us. I could have inquired about the level of importance of the project and the impact to the organization. I didn't do anything and I'm disappointed in myself. (Journal notes, 2011)

There was a core of three to five people who attended more consistently. They represented three levels of the organization: individual contributor, team leads, and a manager. These AR team members demonstrated verbally and through their participation how committed they were to the project. Over the course of the 53 meetings, there were fluctuations in team membership while maintaining an average of 47% attendance.



*Figure 22. Averages of AR team attendance during the study.*

**The impact of time.** Time was a significant constraint for the team throughout the study in two ways: limited time to do routine daily work, and the compounded problem of not having enough time to dedicate to the study. At the beginning of the project when we were reviewing company documents and discussing organizational

barriers and successes, the conversation transitioned into a discussion of individuals' personal experiences regarding time and its impact on performing work. AR team members shared how collective decisions were not made within teams and how they felt their opinions did not appear to matter. Isabella, a manager, explained that "there are times managers are not able to coordinate a collective decision because of limited time." Olivia shared, "There isn't enough time in the day to take our client calls and do our regular work." Josie and Suzanne agreed as well. These employees work long hours to support clients with the highest level of service. The conversations about time constraints continued throughout the study.

There were other instances during a team meeting in which a team member needed to vent about what she had experienced and continued to experience while working in the Consultancy Organization. Several team members had experienced situations related to this theme. During our team meetings, Suzanne would often discuss how her days were consumed with fulfilling client requests while also doing her normal job. The culture of client service took precedence over professional goals and/or personal needs on a daily basis. The co-leads and I should have been better champions for the project and challenged team members and managers to participate more. James said, "It is so difficult to balance everything. I wonder if I am doing anything right any more given our pace of work. This project is on top of everything else I have to do and if something gives, it's going to be this project." The AR team collectively, to an extent, succumbed to the culture, putting the project second and the business at large first.

During another team meeting, there was a team member who was stressed out because of her workload. Isabella was exasperated about the expectations of her role and questioned whether they were realistic.

I am expected to be on every client call. I am double and triple booked. How can I be on more than one call? Isn't there someone else that can join? There aren't enough hours in the day. When my director tells me I need to be on a call I have to make it happen.

Being on the AR team began to take its toll on team members, compounding the problem of time. One team member declined to remain a part of the AR team after fall 2011 because she was worried about her workload. She later left the company. Chloe was another AR team member who simply stopped coming to meetings. When I asked her if we needed to adjust the meeting times, she said her director wanted her to focus on more important projects since her time was limited. The combination of daily duties and the responsibilities of the AR team proved to be an insurmountable challenge for many team members.

### **Challenge: Losing Team Cohesion**

Teams are, at a minimum, held together by unifying goals and the tasks they must complete to be successful. Shaffir, Marshall & Haas (1980) explained that time often becomes an important issue for team members on the matters of commitment and contribution. The AR team had a purpose and a desired state they wanted to reach, but they did not have basic project management skills. These skills would include things such as (a) setting up a web-based presentation, (b) creating a project charter, (c) experience presenting in front of executives and higher levels of management, and (d) writing an

executive summary. In addition, as previously discussed, other circumstances eroded the potential for cohesion on the AR team, which also impacted attendance. These included: (a) transfers to other parts of Greystone, (b) leaves of absence, (c) personal reasons, (d) no shows, (e) resignations, (f) manager-employee disagreements, and (g) workload.

**The need for AR team training.** When the AR team began to meet, there were some indicators (such as the comments and actions of team members) that led me to believe the team lacked some basic project management skills. In addition, they also needed basic information about the process of and tools for performance management. During one of the first few meetings, Isabella said, “We don’t have an opportunity to learn about these things. I’ve never created a project charter before.” At that point, I knew this project would involve more than just addressing PFCs; it would require building the team’s capacities around project planning, performance management, communication strategies, and facilitating in-person and virtual meetings and trainings.

I attempted to empower the group by providing information and asking how they wanted to proceed. This was the most effective way to handle most things. I hoped that the co-leads could share the work between themselves, and I could support them in making decisions or offering suggestions for the group, but that ultimately did not work. My co-leads began telling me they couldn’t attend meetings because of client calls they had, and their presence decreased over time. I knew I couldn’t control everything, but I felt there was some project planning training that my co-leads and the team needed to be familiar with for professional development purposes.

When working with the AR team, in both casual conversations and group discussions, they revealed that they had a limited understanding of performance management, the performance management system, feedback conversations, and even basic information about the roles within the Consultancy organization. Tiffany, an employee, asked, “What is the difference between performance goals and a development plan?” This was a question often asked not only by AR team members but also by other employees. There was a fundamental need to know the basics of performance management.

Another employee, Sanjay, asked me, “How do the goals in the system connect to what I do every day? I don’t understand them.” Many times managers had not provided employees with an understanding of the connections between everyday job duties and the overall division goals. Many of the AR team members had never scheduled a conference room or set up a conference call. I had taken for granted that they would be familiar with these kinds of tasks, but I found that there was more than I anticipated for the group to learn. These personal accounts, in conjunction with the data generated and the documents reviewed by the AR team, provide evidence of some of the challenges facing the Consultancy and CF organizations.

### **Benefit: One Twinkle of Hope**

During the time the AR team met, they experienced many challenges related to attendance and time. However, there was a small benefit of using AR to design and implement the interventions for the AR team. During the study, there were instances in which team members benefited from expanding their professional network to solve daily problems in their jobs. This supports Horwitz and Horwitz’s (2007) suggestion that teams

with denser expressive and instrumental social networks tend to perform better and remain more viable. AR team members used the relationships developed within the team to address issues that arose in their daily duties – unrelated to our research – such as helping one another solve problems for clients by using their collective knowledge of team members. In essence, they leveraged their network, which grew through participation on the AR team.

**Team collaboration.** Early in the formation of the AR team, I decided we needed to do some icebreakers and other activities that allowed everyone to get to know one another quicker. I still felt like we had not crystallized as a team, since everyone did not even know everyone else's name. I needed to find ways to ask the team more questions that would help them reflect on how we could work together to help the organization as a whole with performance feedback.

During one meeting early on, the team was discussing their experiences with performance feedback conversations, mainly identifying barriers to effective PFCs. This soon deteriorated into a venting session. I observed that it was not going to stop any time soon, so I suggested to the group that since we were running out of time for our current meeting, we would reconvene. After the meeting, I thought about a way the team could share their experiences in constructive manner to meet the needs of the study and honor them. I shared an idea with the co-leads to do a gallery walk. I explained that we would post topics that came up in the last meeting and have the AR team members work in pairs to add Post-it notes with their ideas for overcoming the barriers that were discussed in the meeting. There was positive feedback from the AR team about the exercise and validated the transcription of the notes from the exercise.



There were also times when the existence of the AR team provided members with a new network for solving daily work problems. The study provided another way for employees to get to know people they had not previously met within the CF organization. Olivia noted, “When I had a client request come up and I did not know how to handle it, I contacted Grace to ask for help. She was very helpful and I was able to solve my client’s problem.” Suzanne shared, “I was sitting beside Isabella and I was talking about how hard of a time I was having with this project and she was able to give me some tips.” It has proven helpful to some AR team members to be a part of the study. Expanding professional networks increases the resources and knowledge AR team members can access long after the team has disbanded.

The AR team experienced attendance problems and skill limitations throughout the study. Drivers behind these were positional power and organizational culture. This caused frustration among the AR team members, as it took longer to complete tasks and more work had to be completed with fewer people. In the midst of these challenges, the AR team was able to make data-driven decisions about which interventions were best suited for the CF and Consultancy organizations and how to implement them. The co-leads and I did not resolve the attendance problem and thus were unable to distribute work to the team in an equitable manner. As a result, a lot of the organization and work was completed by a few members of the AR team and by me.

A small but important benefit, team collaboration, was a byproduct of the AR team’s journey from identifying the client problem through implementation of the interventions. It is promising to learn that bringing employees together for a unified purpose can increase their professional network. This enlarged internal network can then

be leveraged to solve business problems while operating in a challenging and fast-paced work environment. Overall, within the CF organization and Greystone itself, PFCs did not appear to be a key strategy that most front line managers actively utilized, based on how they operated on a day-to-day basis.

**Research Question 2: What conditions are necessary for successful performance feedback conversations?**

Managers, employees, and their companies have an obligation to cultivate a workplace environment in which honest, high quality, effective PFCs can take place. The conditions that were uncovered through this AR project center around best practices performed by managers and employees and the PFC experiences of employees and managers. Table 19 provides a guide to the supporting themes, providing insight into the second research question.

Table 19

*Research Question 2 Meta-findings, Themes, and Codes.*

Meta-Finding	Themes	Coding:
Promote knowledge sharing: Characteristics of good PFCs	Conversation blueprint	12600 Preparation for PFCs-consistency
		11000 Confidence, support and empowerment in PFCs
Cultivate: The manager-employee developmental relationship	Mindful leadership	80000 Mentorship
		30000 Career conversations
		60000 Learning conversations
		492000 Performance conversations
	Interactions can leave impressions	490000Y Manager and employee positive experiences
		490000S Manager and employee negative experiences
		490000J Manager challenges
		490000I Absence of PFCs or manager-employee relationship
	Tending the garden of relationships	73400 Ownership
		74900 Trust and respect

Meta-Finding	Themes	Coding:
	Sage advice for Chiefs	73500 Communication between manager and employee
		11300 Communication and dialogue with employees
		11200 Build bonds with employees
		73200 Creating a team environment and accessibility

Naomi, a manager I interviewed, shared her thoughts on how she prepares for PFCs, what she expects of her employees, and why she prepares as she does, providing an example of how a manager prepares for PFCs in light of business conditions. In addition, her experience provides a window into how a manager thinks about preparation and suggests how important this ritual is for her as well as her employees. Naomi's reflections on annual PFCs helps to lay a foundation for this section and to consider the data uncovered through the AR project.

Usually when I'm preparing for the [annual review] meeting it's going through all of our meetings, checking my notes, pulling up any client recognitions and anything that's happened, any escalations, how they handled them, what the results were, and just refreshing myself looking at their case stats and all those things that we talk about throughout the year. [I want to make sure that] I'm not looking at my last two weeks of memory. I'd like to see them prepared to discuss things that they think I'm going to mention; that would be great to see. There are a couple that do that, they're like, "Well I noticed that during this period of time I was going through this and that, but as you can see I've brought that up" and make their case. The review isn't final until I sign it and hit submit. I think too many of them don't realize that. They know, but they don't know that until I hit the final "Okay," "Signature," [and] hit "Submit" that our meeting happens before

that occurs and they may be able to paint a different picture for me than what I got from what I saw because their view of it is going to be different. It would be nice if some more of them showed up with that in mind and not just say “okay, okay, okay” and sign.

### **Promote Knowledge Sharing: Characteristics of Good PFCs**

The activities and behaviors of managers and employee have a significant impact on PFCs. Naomi’s words convey her perspective on what constitutes a good PFC. It appears as if some of her employees are passive during annual PFCs. The annual performance review, as well as manager-employee one-on-one conversations, should include engagement from both sides. This section will present a suggested blueprint for PFCs and the developmental relationship between manager and employee based on the data collected from the interviews.

**Conversational blueprint.** The PFCs that managers prepare for and take part in are foundational in a manager-employee relationship. The following sections will share lessons and experiences of managers and employees to provide a map of important topics as they relate to PFCs.

***Preparation for PFCs: Consistency.*** Planning encompasses mitigating risk, using protocols, and ensuring measurable goals. When I asked managers like Cassandra to give advice to other leaders, they offered thoughtful ideas such as “my advice would always be timely.” Naomi suggested, “Plan ahead.” Samantha, an employee, said, “I think the advice I would give is to make sure that you are having regular conversations with the individuals.” These PFC preparation suggestions and others will be discussed in the following section.

First, it always helps at the start of a new performance year to lay a foundation by setting measurable goals. “Measurable” means that each goal is quantified in some manner to provide specific information to gauge completion or achievement of the goal. This can be beneficial to both the employee and manager, since it takes some of the ambiguity out of evaluating achievement and it provides a guidepost for both individuals throughout the year.

Peter and Naomi shared similar thoughts about measurable goals and their importance. Naomi, a manager, explained the importance of having goals “that are measurable and having things that they can really drill in on ‘This is what we need to do,’ – without it being just one metric. We’re planning SMART goals that expand them as people, not just address whatever tactical issue that was the easiest to put out there.”

Naomi had a serious problem with her peer manager, who was not ready to truly measure goals. She ended up taking matters in her own hands and creating more measurable goals for her teams, which contradicted what her peer group agreed to in terms of yearly goals. While there were no real consequences, she was keenly aware that she needed to be an advocate for change. She continued to influence the group toward creating more measurable goals across her peer group.

Peter also emphasized how measurable goals provide clarity and depth in assessing performance:

Being a team lead now and coaching other employees when they try to set up performance [goals] or evaluations they say, “Oh, I created 15 articles.” [And I say] okay, well, “With those 15 articles . . . What’s measurable about all that knowledge that you said you had? Can you measure it by looking at it to say, We

had 15 calls last year on how to do a year-to-date report? Now that you have that article out there, do we have more than 15? Or less than 15? You may have more calls coming in, but it's because you doubled your client base." There are other factors that you have to look at, so it's all with your measuring metrics. That's always something that kind of stuck with me was making sure that you keep something that's tangible when you actually [assess] your accounts [to measure and describe your performance].

Peter believed that quantifying metrics, assessing quality, and evaluating the impact of the results can help paint a more robust picture of one's performance. This can set managers and employees up for PFC success for a given fiscal year.

There are many different paths to preparing for PFCs from both the manager's and employee's perspective. One major step employees and managers took before the annual review PFC was to complete a self-assessment. Employees used the self-assessment to reflect on their performance in the previous year and managers leveraged it to validate or illuminate their employees' achievements and shortcomings.

Ann, Karen, Madison, Samantha, and Peter all noted that they used the self-assessment to prepare for their annual review conversation. Madison discussed the process she went through to complete her self-assessment.

Well, we have to complete the self-assessment. I had to go through emails, which I won't have to do this year because I've created a folder in Outlook, to find like kudos and [emails] from clients. I remember going through that to complete the self-assessment. I looked at [my] previous assessments online [as well]. I hate to do self-assessments. Because it's just, I don't remember a lot of things? We do so

much and so much information passes across our desks, I don't remember a lot of stuff? People are over there going, "Well, I remember I did this, and I was on this committee, and I . . ." And, I'm like, damn, I did that! I didn't even remember to put that in there because I just don't remember. I'm not one to sit down and say [to my manager], "Oh, my clients think I'm great."

Peter shared that it can be "a little bit of a challenge in getting [employees] to keep up with that," noting that he had to "do some handholding with them to keep it [up]." He said he usually "keeps notes of good accomplishments and other items that I need to keep track of for the year . . . [by] looking back over calendars or anything like that where we had certain challenges or meetings . . . [and] needed to have some improvements." Samantha prepares similarly, in that she likes to have her "own little backup . . . weekly operations report that I kind of keep for myself . . . Just to keep myself on track . . . just in case . . . I just made sure I had it with me." Gathering the necessary information to illustrate what took place during the previous performance year is a key component of preparation.

Self-assessments can also uncover vastly different points of view. Peter explained what he has seen in his role as a lead:

You may get self-evaluations back from somebody that they didn't put any effort into it, and they'll even tell you they don't care, "Just give me whatever percent you think you're going to give me and that's it." And have other people who try to glorify everything that they did the entire year, no matter how small the significance of it is. But then you don't need to pander to that group.

Managing reviews across this range can be challenging. Leaders have to take into consideration effort, motivation, achievements, and developmental areas for employees. In order to start to analyze this they have to gather data inclusive of the self-assessment.

Managers, in parallel with employees, should be gathering information continuously to write annual reviews and conduct annual PFCs. Annual and less formal PFCs require the same effort. In addition to gathering information, managers should take time to review the employee's self-assessment to gain perspective. Cassandra, like Jasmin and Naomi, compared their assessments of each employee to each employee's self-assessment. In some situations, she noted:

I look at their self-assessment [and] compare [it and there is] a huge gap. So that is one of the other things that I would look at first to just make sure that I was prepared for [the employee] conversations. Okay, I know I'm going to have to have a different type of conversation with them than I do with people that were pretty much honest across the board.

When there is time to plan, managers and employee can determine what needs to be discussed in greater depth and think about what questions may arise. In the case of managers this time can be spent determining how to manage difficult conversations and perhaps perform some version of scenario planning to strategize for employee PFCs.

It is difficult for managers to mitigate all negative situations in PFCs. However, following some of the aforementioned suggestions, as well as conducting regular PFCs with employees over the course of the year, is crucial to having a smooth annual PFC. If regular one-on-one PFCs take place, this should mitigate the possibility of employees being surprised by the annual PFCs. Conducting formal or informal dialogues throughout



the year helps build rapport, alignment, trust, and a better overall professional working relationship.

Cassandra and Jasmin firmly agree with Naomi's sentiments from a managerial standpoint:

Your annual conversation should not be, "Oh my God, you've never said this before." I think that because we talk about a lot of the things throughout the year, "Hey, this is what you can really do better. This is what you want to try. Here are some stretch assignments," and they know whether or not they've followed up on those things, so they're not really surprised by the feedback that they get and the conversation.

Accountability of both parties is especially important in PFCs. Cassandra described a situation in which she had to provide immediate feedback to an employee while they were on a business trip together. She was adamant that:

no matter how painful it may be, there are times when you've got to have a conversation with someone and you need to have it right now, and I've got tons of other stuff going on . . . I've got a call I need to get on . . . An example [happened] just recently; I was at a client site with a manager and we're still just building the relationship [with the client] and we were in a conversation with the client and . . . she came across a little abrasive . . . and so everyone moved on [in the conversation] and the client didn't say anything.

I kind of went back and forth like, well, is it just me? Maybe it was just me. Because they seemed to all just go . . . but I had to stop and say it, even though I didn't have the relationship with her yet, so you always have that risk . . .

it's hard when you don't have [the relationship built] because then it's, what are you talking about? But I was able . . . to stop and just force myself to say . . .

“Okay, before we go to dinner . . . I want to tell you this because I don't want to forget and I think it's timely. When we were having that conversation you came across pretty abrupt.” Just making sure to hold myself accountable to do that.

Cassandra took a risk in providing immediate feedback to one of her newer employees, with whom her relationship was not established, but took an approach that was open and honest, based on her perspective as a participant in the meeting.

A foundation of conducting regular PFCs is determining the mode and frequency of communication. Many of the interviewees reported that they met formally on a weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly basis. In between, they had informal conversations by way of the internal chatting system, face-to-face, phone, or email. For managers or employees who worked remotely, it was even more important to schedule time to meet. Pranav, an employee, explained, “When I am in the office and my manager is in the office [we have] face-to-face conversations as well. Jasmin as well as other managers make themselves available outside of the scheduled one-on-one meetings they have with employees. She says that I have kept the door open where they can have or set up meetings with me if they want to talk more.”

The frequency of the meetings varied by person, based on the number of employees a manager had as well as on workload. Ann, an employee, shared, “Before we had weekly calls. Now, it is more of a monthly thing because she has so many different teams now.” Cassandra, a manager, reported:

I am a firm believer that the more frequent you have conversations, the more frequent ,[the more] honest [you become] with people, even if it's something that they don't want to hear . . . that makes the whole process so much easier. I will never, ever put something in a performance review that I haven't already talked about. And in good conscience I'm not going to put a glowing review [laughs] if it's not glowing. Trust me . . .

Cassandra is clearly aware of the consequences for her and for the employee if frequent PFCs do not occur; it is a disservice to both parties. The combination of having regular PFCs, establishing a frequency, and varying the mode of communication can enable a healthy and up front manager-employee dialogue when it comes to performance.

***During the PFC: Fairness, objectivity and clarity.*** There are many ways to impact and influence PFCs. When leaders and employees have positive PFCs, their expectations are aligned, they identify areas of improvement, and they embrace feedback and avoid pitfalls. In the following section, I discuss themes that emerged from the data about characteristics related to the broad categories of fairness, objectivity, and clarity positively impacting PFCs.

To have clarity within a PFC, managers and employees must be aligned regarding the expectations of the employee's job. Naomi, a manager, found that after demoting an employee she had to provide the employee with some space in order to move into closer alignment on expectations:

I think she's finally coming around, but sometimes I'm not so sure, because when I talk with her I think we have an understanding. However, when she gives feedback to one of my peers that is very different from the feedback that she gives

me. I'm still trying to get her to open up. I absolutely understand the position she is in and it is a hard pill to swallow. I'm trying to give her space to let her just kind of adjust.

Naomi was empathetic in her approach and put herself in the employee's shoes. This is important in building a solid professional relationship with her employee.

Peter discussed his belief that managers and employees should have shared goals and a common understanding of what needs to be accomplished. "You are expecting managers to give you goals and expectations so you have the same expectations. The things managers would like to see from you." Alignment between managers and their employees regarding individual goals helps lay the fundamental groundwork for PFCs.

When managers deliver PFCs, they should be balanced and conveyed in a manner that employees are likely to be able to receive and understand. Managers should be able to gauge the receptiveness of their employees based on their past conversations and the understanding they've built through day-to-day interactions. Managers engaging in PFCs should incorporate a balance of praise and constructive feedback. Employees Ann, Madison, and Samantha shared similar views on this topic. Madison explained:

I think that if you're [a manager] going to focus on a poor review . . . needs to be tempered with what that person does well. So, that person doesn't leave the meeting thinking that they don't do anything well. You need to find a happy medium, but I think respect is the biggest thing . . . intimidation should not happen . . . and] there shouldn't be threats. There should be an honest, open, two-way communication and I think that they (the manager) needs to listen to the employee. They need to listen to both sides and then weigh the circumstances.

Managers should focus not only on what they are saying, but also on how they say it. As Madison notes, it is a two-way conversation in which both parties must be respectful, active listeners.

Samantha and Cassandra also believe that “there is mutual respect.” Listening is a critical component of dialogue and equally important as speaking. Managers should also take into consideration how they structure their conversation. Samantha suggested that managers should recognize the need to establish a framework for feedback, echoing Madison’s thoughts. Samantha said that managers should “pull (back) out your Manager 101 books that says give me what I’m doing [well], put in there what I’m doing bad, and then bring it back to what I’m doing well . . . the whole sandwich approach.” This is a simple format for managers to use when providing feedback and could lessen the blow of the negative feedback a manager has to provide.

Managers can also make sure they reinforce positive behaviors. Madison noted:

If you go out there and you’re constantly bringing someone attention to the negative things that they do, and you never ever reinforce the positive things that they do, you’re going to get a negative employee. I think you have to do equal parts positive and negative reinforcement. I think you have to do equal parts positive and negative reinforcement. But, I’m saying that if someone does something that, that stands out that needs to be brought to their attention rather than saying, “Well, they know what they did.”

PFCs should be an opportunity for managers to provide feedback in a holistic manner that includes encouraging employees to repeat desired behaviors.

Ideally, just as managers should have a game plan for conducting regular PFCs with employees throughout the year, they also need to prepare for and think through the annual review conversation. This should be a capstone conversation for the year. It may be a longer conversation, but it is equal in importance to the regular PFCs. Cassandra and Naomi shared their approaches to annual PFCs from a managerial perspective. Cassandra reported printing the reviews, taking notes, ensuring that each employee had quiet time to read their review before they had a conversation, and inviting the employee to ask questions up front before going through the review in detail.

Cassandra offered a different approach for addressing employees whose self-assessments were vastly different from hers:

When I did find that I had someone where their self-assessment is a lot different from mine, I did theirs a little bit different. In the sense that I went over each objective with them first . . . to say we talked about this, but this is what I'm looking at in this area. So I took a little bit more time as opposed to [the others] . . . And I even did that before I said, "Read it." I wanted to just make sure they understood exactly where we were coming from and then that conversation went a whole lot differently because they were like, "Oh, okay . . . so now I'll read through my assessment and yours and then we'll talk through it." And that helped tremendously. I want to hear your perspective on maybe a difference between your higher and your lower performance or your middle of the road performance.

Cassandra found a way to manage those employees whose self-assessments differed significantly from hers, for the betterment of the employee and the discussion. In addition, she understands her employees well enough that she can anticipate what they

will ask and how they will react. She shared how she prepares for an employee whom she anticipates will have a lot of questions and will need additional clarification to establish a mutual understanding:

There was one person in particular that there wasn't a big difference, but some of the things that she wrote, [I said to myself], "Mmmm, no, that's not what I'm . . . You do really [well] in that, but this section was referring to this part. . . ." She's one of those people who will have a million and two questions and I know that and I'm fine with that. I have to be prepared, because I know she's going to [say], "Well, what about this?" And I [say to myself] okay, I'm ready . . .

It is extremely important for managers to know their employees; this knowledge helps them to establish buy-in and to motivate individuals or teams. Naomi had a different approach to annual PFCs, as she sent her reviews to employees before they met, so they had time to read it in advance. Providing this time beforehand for employees to read their reviews enables her to keep the conversation at a high level. She noted:

Sometimes they have [read it], sometimes they haven't [read it]. I typically start the meeting with, "I'm not going to read this verbatim because it was given to you already so you should have read it, so we are going to high level through each area and I'll expound on what it is that I've seen and where you have opportunities if there are some." Then it's usually, "Okay, do you have questions [or] feedback?" Nine times out of 10 it's no, and then we move onto the next section. Usually some have only read the last comments because those are the ones next to the final score. Those are the only comments they ever have questions on. That's usually a big "tell" that they didn't even bother to read the

rest of it – they looked at their [performance rating] numbers, went down to the bottom and moved on.

Because Naomi puts in a lot of work on her reviews, she responds with disappointment or frustration toward those who do not fully participate in the annual PFC.

***Delivery and presentation.*** Now that we have discussed structure, the next layer of PFCs is how information is delivered and presented. It is important for both parties to give the discussion their full attention and engage in open communication, active listening, and positioning information for the best possible reception. Jasmin and Madison echoed one another's thoughts when they described the importance of listening, providing one's full and undivided attention, and keeping communication open.

Cassandra and Madison explained how they felt about positioning feedback.

Cassandra reflected:

I think sometimes you can give feedback and it could be the way you position it; it could come across as a lack of respect. [You have to] make sure you're not attacking the person but [focusing on] the behavior or the issue at hand . . . and try to be open to hearing their side or perspective. I think as a leader we have to see things [in a particular way because of our role] and I may think that this is how it should be done, but I've had opportunities where I've had someone to help me look at something a little bit differently, that I hadn't thought of [in] that way. That helps to build the trust because it's not this dictatorship . . . just do what I [want to do . . . people may do what you tell them to do but they're not going to do it to the best of their ability . . . they're not going to give you the buy-in that you need to really sustain the positive behavior.



Madison also felt strongly about how feedback is positioned during PFCs. She said, “The way that you present is everything. I think that the managers [should] have to go through some kind of training on how to talk to employees.” She shared how counterproductive it is when a manager lack basic communication skills and engages in behavior such as yelling during PFCs, belittling employees, or talking to them like children. This is certainly not acceptable and underlines the need for managers and employees to use proper and professional language during PFCs.

Another nuance to PFCs is that discussions of areas for improvement are just as important as identifying an individual’s strengths. Managers and employees have varying levels of comfort in discussing areas for improvement, and providing feedback about both areas for improvement and strengths during PFCs gives balance to the conversation. Some employees have a high level of awareness of their strengths and areas in need of development. Madison, an employee, has a good grasp on her areas of improvement. “When I have a conversation [with my manager] that focuses on my weaknesses, I think I already know that going in. Depending upon how it’s delivered . . . it can make me want to do a better job and to work harder to . . . improve those weaknesses.”

Cassandra, a manager, shares examples with her employees and reminds them of previous conversations when providing feedback on areas to improve. “I gave them some examples, “for this innovation [goal], I’m looking for how many times you made a suggestion in regard to a process improvement over the year. Remember when I talked to you about this?” One employee, Karen, had a positive experience when her manager provided her feedback about managing nonverbal cues. She had not realized this was an area in need of improvement or how it impacted her presence. Karen reported:

She talked about me not having a poker face. She wanted me to learn to have that. Not wearing it. “Huh!” or whatever that looks like. She told me she needed me to work on it. Immediately, I thought, “I don’t know what that has to do with anything.” It was only later that I realized that was very important. I still struggle with it, not like I did before [because I didn’t think anything was wrong]. Once she raised awareness, then I became aware.

Naomi, a manager, provided feedback to one of her employees about areas in need of improvement. It was hard for the employee to hear the feedback and change their behavior. “It’s sometimes difficult to get people to decide to do that [change]. They get comfortable where they are. It’s hard for everyone.” Change can be difficult for many people, especially when it involves their work performance.

Samantha, an employee, entered an annual review session thinking it was only going to focus on developmental areas. She quickly realized there was some feedback on areas for improvement, but her manager also discussed the things that went well. She was receptive to this approach and reflected on the feedback to understand how to improve.

She agreed, there were some times where I might have taken a step back because I felt there was a lot on my plate or I may not have put myself out there in a meeting and voiced my opinion on certain things . . . She could see it as well and I think we were on the same page now. Going in [to the annual review] I thought she was going to actually just highlight all of the negative, but she didn’t. There were some areas of improvement, but we’ve talked about those throughout the year, like maybe in a one-on-one. During this feedback session it was more about the positives.

Similarly, Peter, an employee, would like to receive feedback and act accordingly based on what is shared. He said:

If [the review] is good, I'm glad to get the praise; if it's bad then you just want to work better. As well as trying to coach them on accomplishments and anything . . . they need to work on for improvements.

Discussing areas of improvement allows managers and employees to take steps to increase their level of communication and enhance clarity on how to achieve established goals in a given year. A natural segue after discussing feedback is employee's capacity for embracing it.

***Embracing feedback.*** Embracing feedback involves a partnership between managers and employees. Employees can decide to disagree or agree with feedback received, even if their manager has identified an area in need of refinement. There must be a level of ownership from both parties regarding their roles and what is expected from them. Madison, an employee, understood and agreed with her manager's feedback regarding improvement in Microsoft Excel.

I agreed with it totally . . . I signed it without a problem . . . she wanted me to take Excel training. She's been telling me to take this training for probably two years and I haven't done it yet. I remember her telling me that I definitely have to do it. I remember complaining about the client presentations that she wants us to do [which involve the use of Excel].

Madison shows complete ownership of not taking the training and demonstrated accountability for her actions.

Embracing feedback does not always come in ideal situations. Samantha shared how she can understand another manager's position, even when she doesn't agree.

In other situations, even if I don't agree with you . . . but I understand where she's coming from. I understand what she stands for. She's really about the business dimension, so if something happens with a client, I could actually go to her because she understands the business and the product. Now, when it comes to her employee relations [skills] – I'm like, "Did you really say that?"

The elements involved in PFCs – alignment, balance, determining how information will be presented, embracing feedback, identifying and sharing areas for improvement – are each important, yet these are only examples of the numerous tips, suggestions, and ideas that exist to refine PFCs. It is the job of employees and managers to be stewards in the PFC process to yield the best possible outcome.

***Confidence, support, and empowerment in PFCs.*** We have discussed how and why PFCs must be a two-way conversation between manager and their employees. Managers play an active role in being a "helper" or guide for the employee in many instances. Along with these duties, managers have power in their position. This can easily enable them to be a voice of support, instilling confidence and creating space for employees to feel empowered. In the following section I will discuss how understanding personalities can be vital information for managers, how PFCs can help refocus employees, how PFCs can positively impact performance, and how PFC encounters can be positive due to managerial support. The experiences of the managers and employees interviewed showcase the importance of each of these elements to successful PFCs.

First, it is necessary for managers to understand their employees' personalities and motivations. When managers get to know their employees professionally, they learn their strengths and areas for improvement, observe what environment or situation enables them to produce the best possible results, and learn what they like and dislike about work and what inspires them. Naomi, a manager, uses every interaction she has to build relationships with her employees. "A lot of it is just talking to them . . . casual conversations . . . our one-on-ones . . . there is a whole section of this is what you need to do . . . what are your challenges, concerns, etc. But then usually [during our one-on-ones] if there's time left over, [we] just talk." She finds this to be a helpful approach because, "[by] knowing them from a personality standpoint . . . and I understand their motivations for a lot of them."

Similarly, Jasmin leverages this information to understand how to work effectively with and guide her employees. "I know their working styles, so I don't say, 'Okay, you're not doing it this way.' Because that [might] not [be] their working style, right? It's good to understand that of employees." It is incumbent upon managers to develop rapport and learn about their employees, then apply this information to leverage positive results for the employee, team, and organization.

During PFCs, managers can help refocus employees to promote alignment and enhance overall communication. Jasmin, a manager, shared a situation in which an employee was interested in working in another area, but needed some guidance along the way.

Next time they'll come back and say, "Okay we discussed this in the performance review and here's why I'm trying to do this." [Let's] say for example, one of the

employees wanted to go into other field. I was like, “Well you have to get better [at] documentation. If you want to move [into] this area they require a lot of documentation.” So, every time now, they all know to bring to my attention . . . they’ll say, “Okay, I’ve created this documentation, I’ve put it out there [on the shared drive]. Can you review it for me? Can you check it out to see if it’s okay?” I’m like wow, okay, they’re listening.

Jasmin exuded passion in her voice and presence when she spoke about her investment in her employees’ careers and performance, as well as in them as people. Naomi also found that PFCs in many cases, “helped to refocus them . . . so they understood exactly what they needed to hone in on and where they wanted to grow and to start seeking opportunities, and [for] some people I don’t think it impacted them one way or the other.” How PFCs influence an employee’s path will depend on the manager, the employee, and the employee’s particular situation.

PFCs can positively impact performance and provide opportunities for managerial support. More than half of the interviewees shared experiences illustrating how PFCs influenced their performance in a positive manner. These conversations encouraged them to aspire to different roles, improved their attitude at work, instilled confidence, and provided space to think about how they could perform more effectively in their role. For some, PFCs even improved self-esteem. Interviewees like Pranav felt that positive PFCs included areas to work on. “I think past conversations have helped my performance because it’s shown me areas of opportunity which I may not have been aware of previously.”

Cassandra, Naomi, and Jasmin all glowed when they spoke about employees whose performance they had directly impacted as a result of their feedback and guidance. Naomi said that PFCs “definitely [have] a big impact on how I relate to [employees] with how well they’re performing in their job and how well they’re developing within it.” She gave the example of an employee who struggled with grammar. This was a critical part of his role and she provided feedback that it was an area in which he needed to improve; she even suggested courses he could take. After they met, Naomi gradually began to see that “he actually took the advice that he got during our regular one-on-one meetings and he’s in our Emerging Leaders Program and working towards moving up in the company.” She beamed like a proud parent when she told this story.

Cassandra shared a similar experience. When she became Samantha’s manager two years ago, she coached her to become more of a leader. Her guidance assisted Samantha to develop from an informal leader to achieving a promotion to a lead position.

At the time when she started working with us, I was a front line employee working on different projects. I was a functionalized person within the department. I was doing everything [and] “This is what I do. I come to work every day and I do it” and [my manager said], “Okay you’re seen as a leader on the team . . . people come to you with questions. When you’re helping them or guiding them on whatever it is that they’re doing, you take it [and do it for them] if [you] felt like they really didn’t get it, instead of actually teaching them how to do it.” She started to see that I was doing some of that stuff, and she [said], “At a point you no longer continue to be a doer, you need to try and help the team and get the work done through the team.” Being that I didn’t have the title, I felt like I

couldn't do it. Then she started to like kind of coach me, "No, you have the qualities of a leader; you need to help the team." I think from there, I came from under the radar and started to show others what I was worth. She just opened my eyes, like changed my whole paradigm of how I actually saw the work that I was doing.

During one of our interviews, Cassandra reflected on the coaching experience with Samantha. I could see excitement in her gestures as she leaned across the desk and hear the jubilation in her voice when the words danced in the air.

We had a client issue that came up. [And Samantha's] gotten to the place where I don't even have to stop her as much and say, "Well, did you do this? Or what about that?" She's kind of done exactly what I hoped that she would do. I don't have to constantly say, "Well, what about this? Or what about that?" She's thought of everything.

The positive impacts of PFCs on employees are varied and situation specific. The messaging and approach a manager uses can determine how impactful the discussion is. Cassandra explained her stance on making her messages count to employees: "Sometimes you [have to] . . . really get to what's driving the person . . . [you have to] bring it down to a personal level to get it to click, especially for someone that you feel [is] worth saving." In the examples discussed, the managers appeared to have good intent behind their actions in PFCs and for the most part, employees felt that PFCs positively impacted them.

Managers provide support of their employees in many ways; they can be cheerleaders, guides, and sounding boards. Some managers, like Jasmin, like to "just pick



up the phone and say, ‘Thank you so much; this was very nice of you.’” Showing appreciation in even a small manner can reap exponential benefits later on. Ann, an employee, says her manager, “makes me feel fabulous . . . it makes me feel like I’m doing a great job and it makes me feel like top dog. She really feels like I can do anything.”

Ann also shared that her manager reminds her of the things she has to work on to become an even better performer and she appreciated and embraced the feedback. In addition, Ann feels she has more confidence and has “been thinking about [what she aspires to do] a lot lately and decided it’s time to go out on a limb and . . . try something new.” During the course of my interviews with Ann she was promoted to a lead position. She explained that this was something she thought hard about and her manager was a huge support for her, but she had to make the decision herself.

Naomi had an employee to whom she provided feedback because she saw his potential, and because he was unsure of what he wanted. After she provided a few suggestions to try some things, he eventually saw that he did want to try new things and progress within the company.

He said, “there are some people outside of this group I don’t particularly care for so I don’t know if I want to move beyond it.” He came back and he said, “All right, I’m willing to try it,” and so we’ve had him doing presentations for all of the different regions; he’s . . . interviewed for the Emerging Leader Program and was selected . . . and he’s just really taking off and doing a lot of varied things and getting ready to move into supervisory roles and he’s looking at those and looking

at applying for things and so it was a really positive experience. It was nice to have someone pushed out of the nest. And they actually decided to fly.

There are certain ineffective approaches managers should take care to avoid in PFCs. Problematic behaviors include misalignment of goals, not providing feedback targeted toward areas to work on, regurgitating the information that employees shared, and not customizing conversations. Cassandra, a manager, had an employee who received feedback from a previous supervisor that was not comprehensive.

She told me that the feedback that she had gotten before – cause she had applied for SDM roles – was around her appearance... just that she needs to fix herself up more, look more business . . . professional. She [said], “I don’t think that’s fair, based on the work that I do . . . if I go to a client I make sure that I look really professional. I’m in the office; there [are] no clients here. That shouldn’t be held against me.”

The employee had to conduct research to elicit more comprehensive feedback from her previous manager, which resulted in them working together on defining her aspirations. Incomplete feedback can yield potentially harmful outcomes in relation to employee perspective and confidence.

Naomi found that her annual PFC with her manager was lackluster. She felt that she was provided little to no constructive or developmental feedback and that was disappointing to her. “My current performance review I didn’t get very much from. [It] wasn’t necessarily taking into account the things that I’d already expressed an interest in developing within myself that I think that I need to do work on.” Peter, similarly, saw his yearly PFC as boring.

You're just sitting there listening and going over the same stuff that you had before, non-effective- well instead of non-effective let's just say its fast; that might be a little more polite. Because it's the "Hey, you got a second? Let's go over here and meet." Then it's, "Okay here's your stuff, this is what we put down, here's your score. This is what your projected raise is going to be. Now how do you think about that?" [laughs] They copy and paste whatever I send them for myself and they put that in . . . they copy and paste it and use that for the evaluation.

Tailoring PFCs to individual employees takes time but has much greater value for the employee. Time spent planning for PFC for the individual could possibly have more positive short- and long-term outcomes. Pranav, an employee, had an experience with a previous employer whose PFCs felt "canned." He explained,

It's like a form report. It tends to not be very useful to the person who's getting the feedback. I definitely don't think it was useful for the manager because they . . . were just going through and kind of going through the motions . . . no real [room] for customization.

These are situations managers should be aware of and avoid. PFCs should be robust, two-way conversations that benefit the individual, team, and organization.

Managers can also be powerful sources of confidence, encouragement, and positive reinforcement for employees. Jasmin is an excellent example of a manager with a realistic perspective and supportive attitude when approaching challenges in employee performance. The data poem in Jasmin's own words below illustrates the complexities of the manager-employee relationship and paints a vivid picture of how various elements

involved in PFCs may be woven together for the better good of the individual, team, and organization.

***Re-PURpose Talent***

*team used to come to me and say  
he's trying to create this friction  
friction friction friction  
used to confront him, just factual information*

*I've heard* *they said*

*he used to just get emotional on me every time*  
*I don't know what else to do with him*

*put him in the back end*

*don't think he's a people person  
testing stuff  
very smart  
very analytical  
NOT in front of clients  
see if HE is successful that way  
HE seemed to like it  
changed him, COMPLETELY*

*thank you . . . for thinking about this  
enjoying what I'm doing right now*

*now that you're enjoying it  
let's see how we can make it better*

*document document document  
he used to not share  
ANYTHING with anybody*

*don't like anybody being smarter than me*

*going forward, we won't have this  
you will not be the only one bogged down with this  
other people looking into it with you  
MENTOR them*

*documentation was not his strength  
Let's partner you up,  
work together with them  
REALLY made him feel good  
ended up moving to another group  
he wanted to do testing  
COMPLETELY changed him  
I THOUGHT, okay, let's see how we can use him  
take the BEST out of people  
best out of people  
best out of people*

*how he can HELP our team out  
 seemed to like that  
 took a chance  
 just took a chance  
 I tried EVERYTHING  
 take this last chance and see what happens*

*made me feel like WOW  
 I had gone to HR  
 the old manager, she ran—you know  
 all we can do is try different things  
 don't want to give up on him  
 he is so SMART*

*as human beings, have our own good traits  
 take whatever we can do positively  
 help the company  
 taking care of our clients  
 results oriented, you know  
 doesn't mean...take a whip out  
 there are ways to getting work done  
 learned that from how my dad used to deal with things  
 just don't like to give up  
 he's going to be my challenge  
 I'm going to see what I can do for him*

### **Cultivate: The Manager-Employee Developmental Relationship**

Managers and their employees interact on many levels to develop a working relationship. A function of this basic working relationship is how managers guide, how employees interact, and how they work collaboratively. This section will discuss managers' mindful leadership, how manager interactions leave impressions, cultivating relationships, and advice for leaders. The developmental relationship between managers and employees is fundamental to performance management.

**Mindful leadership.** Leaders are tasked with an immense amount of accountability to the larger organization and to the people they lead. They navigate this minefield of personalities, decisions, and work product through four drivers: mentorship,

career, learning, and performance. The experiences of the interviewees in these areas will be discussed in the following sections.

***Mentorship.*** Mentoring captures the essence of teaching moments. Within this section perspectives of general mentoring and experiences of managers will be explored. Employees' need for mentoring spans a continuum: some employees do not need much mentoring and do not seek it; at the other end of the spectrum are those who would like it, but do not receive it.

The extent to which mentoring exists in the manager-employee relationship can impact whether and how this bond develops. When mentoring does not take place it can impact employees in a variety of ways, depending on whether or not an employee desires a mentoring relationship. For example, employees who are not mentored may feel they are missing out on an opportunity, and may try to compensate for this by reading or attending training. Madison had a disdainful disposition during our conversation. "You know what? I find that there really isn't a lot of mentorship." Both Madison and Ann wanted a mentoring relationship and believed it would have a positive impact on them.

Peter, another employee, was in an awkward situation in which his manager had previously been in Peter's role. When Peter began to ask questions, seeking mentorship, his manager did not take on a mentor role, but instead asked him to find out things on his own.

I would say that it does not exist. I don't see it happening. The person I have as my manager now was in the position of team lead, and that has presented some challenges because I'll be asked to do certain tasks or help out with certain department, but yet having been in that role before, that person [manager] is

coming to me and asking me questions about it. “Where are the instructions? Where is the knowledge base that you had put in place?” Even though it was a relatively new product, we need to have some instruction here and mentoring, but yet it’s just not there. That’s just a huge challenge.

Peter still had a positive view of his role and the shortcomings of his manager, but expressed disappointment in the lack of mentoring he received. These are missed opportunities by managers.

In contrast, some employees did not express a need for mentorship and some managers had employees who did not require a lot of mentorship. Jasmin observed that one of her employees was a lot easier to mentor, almost to the point of not needing mentorship.

I think he’s just naturally born with it. Sometimes I have to tell him, “Okay, we all get frustrated, that’s fine. Why don’t we look at it this way?” Sometimes we look at things one way, but if I give him another way to look at things, that’s all I have to do. I don’t have to work too hard on him.

Managers should gauge how much mentoring an employee may or may not need to ensure their needs are being met. Employees must also take responsibility for knowing and asking for what they need in the form of mentorship. If they do not know then it is incumbent on the manager to monitor this and know when to step in to help.

Karen confidently shared that she usually does not need mentoring.

I didn’t need a whole lot of support from her. I didn’t look to her for coaching or mentoring type. I just didn’t think I need that. I was able to look at people, watch them and observe. If there is something that I want to pull from that person, or

there is something that I like about them and how they do a certain task, or how they present themselves, or whatever that looks like, I'm able to glean from that and own it for myself. So, I don't ever want—I never sat down and like, “Could you just coach and mentor me here and there?” I've always kind of known how to navigate just from observation.

Managers teach through their actions, words, and ideas. While not all employees are as observant as Karen, it is helpful for managers to understand the ways in which various employees learn.

Managers and employees reported enjoying and benefitting from their mentoring experiences in ways that ranged from enhancing their knowledge to earning or planning for promotional opportunities to molding leaders. Cassandra enjoyed working with employees, “getting them to see things differently and watching them grow.” Naomi shared a similar experience. “I enjoy working with people, developing them and seeing the potential in people . . . actually seeing them realize it. It's probably the thing I have the most joy out of my job.”

Karen, Naomi, and Samantha related positive experiences related to being mentored through actions and observation, having a strategic versus tactical mentoring conversation, and being molded into a leader. Karen reflected on a valuable skill she acquired through her relationship with her manager.

One of the things that I did get from one of my managers is being confident in your delivery. When asked, or when sharing, be very confident about the information you're sharing, because even in dealing with her, you really have to be confident in the information that you are conveying. Otherwise, she'll punch



holes in it, and then you begin to question yourself. Then you become more—more conscious of your work and understanding [it] because when you go to her, you're really going to have to really understand it. So, that's—that's a big for me. That's one of the things I was able to take back from one of my managers in particular.

Cassandra, Karen's manager, prefers to teach and mentor through questioning. This has proven to be a helpful technique for Karen as well as for other participants who report to Cassandra. Naomi's eyes lit up when she spoke about her mentoring relationship with an employee. "He usually will come to me with the different things he's learned. We've moved beyond the tactical and we're looking at strategic things for him which is really exciting." She was enthusiastic about this employee's potential and progress.

Samantha appeared very humbled as she described her mentoring experience. Her voice conveyed deep admiration and gratitude for her previous manager.

My previous manager totally mentored me to become the leader that I am today. Coming from a front line employee into being in leadership, I feel like she molded me into being a strong leader. It took a different way to mentor me, knowing that these employees weren't going to perceive me well or give me a hard time. [She was able] to mentor and show me, this is the way you want to first start carrying yourself as a leader. [She made] sure that I was networking, getting my name out there with other leaders, sending me to crucial conversation and leaders as a coach [trainings]. When she was involved in like meetings with employees, just bringing me in and being able to watch how she interacted with

them and just spending time with me and bringing me up as up to speed as a . . . a leader.

Mentoring can be a form of advocacy, as we saw in Samantha's story, or it can be a means of learning new skills and obtaining professional guidance. It is definitely valuable to the manager-employee relationship in cases in which mentoring is sought and appreciated.

***Career conversations.*** The guidance employees receive from managers through mentoring is closely aligned with the benefits of career conversations. This section discusses employee initiative, career advice and support from managers, planning for promotions, and employee promotions.

First, employees should take initiative and have an active role in shaping their career. Conversations with their manager can help guide them on this path. There is a level of readiness for change for each employee. There are situations that employees demonstrate initiative to learn more and those employees who are keeping their focus on one a particular role. Ann, an employee, thinks that:

It's something that you have to determine on a personal level; you have to be ready to do more. Management can try and push you or show you other opportunities or other ways for growth, but you have to be ready to grow in that aspect before you'll move forward. I think I was just really comfortable with what I was doing before, and I'm not really sure what changed but something definitely changed and made me want to branch out and try other things.

Ann assessed her readiness even though she didn't quite know what triggered the change.

Peter also took steps to learn more about how to advance his career. He navigated how to get promoted, expanded his network, and identified possible courses of action.

I know in the past, even to get the team lead position, it's usually [incumbent upon you] to take initiative. I went to speak with the VP to see what would have needed to be done to go to the next step. I've been looking for a management position.[I've been] looking with other managers that I deal with just to see what courses, certifications I need. What is going to benefit me as far as getting that position and seeing what was available out there . . . doing some networking and then also making sure that I have the proper qualifications. In careers, I've always found that it's always best just to have small personal conversations maybe over lunch . . . hearing those little bits of what they were successful at . . . a lot of times I think they're going to be more open and not realize what they're talking about when they're just telling their normal story in conversation.

In a few instances, employees completely aligned themselves with a role they were focused on attaining. Cassandra and Jasmin both shared stories in this regard. Cassandra's employee aspired to be a manager and Jasmin's employee wanted to be CEO of the company. In both instances they supported their employees fully. Jasmin shared her thoughts about her employee's path to becoming a CEO.

He's very ambitious. I think that I said, "Where do you see yourself within the next 10 years? I know what your short-term goal is; I know where you want to go. But tell me." He goes, "I would like to be the next CEO at Greystone." I was like, Wow. That would make me feel like, wow, because someone that I managed is going to get to that level, and I know he can. I know he'll be able to achieve that

because he has it in him, he has that hunger. He's ambitious, he's smart; I think he can do it. I think what I see in the leader's role is charismatic, having that vision of the future, also being very strategic, and he has it all. So, I had that conversation with him. He goes, "I'm not trying to show off or anything, but this is where I see myself." I just enjoy just listening to him—how does he plan to do this? And he says, "Well, right now I'm—this is just a little step I'm taking." The projects that I'd given him, [he is] meticulous. The documentation and with the numbers to back it up, and not just giving me, "Okay, here's how we know." The facts to back it up, which I see as someone who has that vision.

A manager can guide and support an employee's active pursuit of career advancement. By the same token, the absence of managerial guidance can impact an employee's career path negatively or positively, or have no impact at all.

Career advice can complement employee initiative. Advice can be provided from managers, mentors, or peers. In this case we are exploring the managerial perspective. Sharing career advice is a form of support for the employee and a way to foster a developmental relationship. The interviewees reported receiving career advice from a manager recommending training classes, providing support for career progression, and offering general encouragement to explore career opportunities.

Karen and Madison both had a manager who, before departing for a new role, gave them advice about the incoming manager. Karen's manager told her to be cautious about asking too many questions, as not everyone interprets asking questions as an opportunity to seek understanding. It can be also understood as challenging a manager's position, power, or knowledge.

I was really nervous about the transition because I had worked with her for so long, and I understood her management style, and she knows that I'm a why person why, why, why. She knows that that's not any disrespect. But before she left she said be careful with the why, why, why; because not everybody views that as your methodology of understanding or gaining knowledge so that you can do a good job. I knew that from my past management that not everybody likes that. They don't like to be asked why we doing this and how does that tie into that. I do that for understanding and clarity. She told me to be careful with that and gave me some pointers on what I needed to do [when I] reported to the new manager. Of course, I took all of those things into account and my manager [and I] work [together] very, very, very well.

Ultimately, Karen followed the advice her manager gave her and was successful in adapting to her new supervisor.

Managers can also help employees by offering suggestions on training courses and overall education. Madison, Karen, and Peter all discussed instances in which their managers either shared suggestions for training or supported their current educational goals. Madison reflected on the mentoring she received in a previous role, when she worked as a manager for a family-owned business.

They really took the people that they had working for them under their wing, and really made them feel like they were part of the family. And, I think, that's so important that you feel you're part of the bigger picture. When their employees consistently grow, I mean, it's, and it's a reflection back on that manager.

Peter is seeking a managerial role, and his manager offered suggestions for courses to take. “Well, she made recommendations for other positions that she’s heard about and made recommendations for some management classes that are available to us.” Karen’s manager, Cassandra, provided a tremendous amount of support for a program she is attending even though it is not related to her job. “Oh my God, she’s very, very supportive. She was just all for it. I can remember my first day of class she said, ‘Leave, you need to leave! It’s at 3:00, get out of here!’ She was so excited for me. She’s been excited for me throughout.”

Providing encouragement to explore career advancement is a wonderful way for managers to support employees. Promoting curiosity about different roles, departments, and functions can instill trust in the manager-employee developmental relationship. Jasmin is Pranav’s manager and they both shared experiences about encouragement. Jasmin was enthusiastic about employee growth and providing encouragement to her team.

I always like to see people grow. I always tell them that “Hey, don’t be stuck on this. Just keep on exploring things or keep learning things,” because I am that way. I like to learn things. I like to keep myself going. There’s nothing wrong with learning. It doesn’t stop you from anything. It in fact kind of adds to your abilities and adds to who you are. It adds to how you do things. So just keep on learning.” I just like to push them on that. I like to keep on saying, “Okay, yes, you can do it.” There are times employees will come back and say, “Okay, no, I don’t think . . .” and I’ll say, “Yes, you can do it.” You have to believe in it. You just have to believe in it and you can do it.

Jasmin enjoys assisting and advising her employees as they explore career options. She challenges her employees because of her belief in their abilities. It is as if she is a personal cheerleader for them. When they begin to doubt themselves, she reminds them of what they can achieve. Jasmin shared:

My manager has been very supportive of my current career, and not just with myself, but I noticed with my colleagues as well; she's always encouraging us to explore things that we like and sort of just gaining expertise in areas that we feel are of interest to us. And she makes all of that very accessible. For example, one of my colleagues, she was thinking about going back, she didn't finish her university degree, I think she had one year left or something of that sort, so she was very supportive of her going back and she was very encouraging and motivating to her. It's kind of been supportive to the whole team as well on a larger scale to kind of see that, so it motivated her and a few other folks to go back and take care of those things.

Focused support on career aspirations from managers can provide stepping stones to a new role, help socialize an employee's performance and successes, smooth an employee's transition out of the workplace, and simply provide a listening ear when employees would like to talk. Ann, Cassandra, Naomi, and Samantha shared experiences in these areas. Ann felt that her manager supported her "100% and even before [my current manager], our old manager, they were very supportive and always very eager to help us move anywhere that we want to move."

Cassandra discussed another situation in which an employee was interested in another role; her general approach in these situations was to provide exposure to the role.

I get them the experience and the exposure to that role first because I think a lot of times people see a role and they say, “Ooh, I want to do that,” but they really don’t know what that role is. It may not be where their strengths are and they may not enjoy it . . . I don’t want them to chase a title. I want them to enjoy the job.

Jasmin shared that her manager was “very supportive whenever I’ve gone to him. When I come back and say, ‘Okay I want to learn this or I want to take this class’ he’s always very supportive and he’ll say, ‘whatever you need to do.’” Perhaps the support from her own manager filters down to Jasmin’s team. Naomi, a manager, had an employee who was not doing well in his role. She had flexibility in her business so she was able to allow him to work a later shift, which enabled him to explore external opportunities without jeopardizing the business. The employee ultimately left to pursue another career.

Cassandra is working to help Samantha move into a management role. To do this she has placed Samantha on projects that give her more visibility. In addition, this will give Samantha the exposure she needs to help other leaders recognize her abilities and view her as a leader. During their time together, they had a conversation about pursuing other roles, when Cassandra announced she was leaving for a new job in another part of the business.

Cassandra: So you’ve got to be a leader always. You’re going to lead the team meeting, so tell me what you want to do.

Samantha: Okay, I want to tell you something . . . I’m thinking about posting out to another role.

Cassandra: Well . . .



Samantha: Is that a bad thing?

Cassandra: Well, it is if you're leaving just because somebody moved your cheese. Not if you're leaving because you're ready. You've already been looking at something else. That's different. I said, "So you've got to . . . I don't want you to want to leave because I'm not here."

Samantha: Well, maybe . . .

Cassandra: Well, what I would suggest you do is have a conversation with Margaret. Have a conversation with Beth. Try to understand exactly what they're looking for to make sure that this is what you want to do.

(Time passes. Samantha speaks with Beth and Margaret.)

Samantha: Okay . . . well, I don't think I'm going to go for it. One of the things that I've gotten from you is that you've been extremely honest with me. You told me that people didn't see me as a leader. Margaret would have never told me that. I worked under Margaret before and . . . at one point Margaret did, but then I think it got to the point where Margaret would just be like, "You can do it. You've got it. You can do it." It was more encouraging. But you were like "People don't see you that way. You need to get to that point." It was hard for me to hear that at first. So I don't want to go back and not get that kind of feedback any more. I'm worried because I need someone who's going to give me that type of feedback, so I can continue to grow.

Cassandra provided helpful advice to help guide Samantha in her decision. It is important for managers to allow employees to make their own decisions, while providing insight and perspective so the employee can make an informed decision.

Managers who are planning promotions have to take a lot of information into consideration from both the organization and the individual. Organizational constraints include factors such as a lack of room for growth, the promotion process, and budgets. The individual perspective takes into consideration changing roles and family situations. Some situations incorporate both individual and organizational aspects; for example, employees testing out a role or the micromanaging of employees by supervisors. Ann, while at a former employer, “felt like there’s [wasn’t] room for growth . . . management [was] not necessarily having those kind of conversations . . . because there was not really anywhere for you to move.” Certainly it is an organizational constraint if the structure of the organization does not allow for career paths upward or across different groups.

Peter felt strongly about the promotion process itself. He believes there is not enough sharing of information between the management team and those interested in being promoted.

Performance reviews are I think sometimes are viewed differently than anything related to career or advance into the next level . . . “I did fine on all my evaluations . . . why am I not getting promoted?” [Manager says] “Oh, well you need to do this, this, and this for this promotion . . .” I think [this] is a common mistake and I have also heard or seen that with other employees too.

This is an area for managers to be aware of because it impacts budgeting, but it is equally important for employees and managers to be clear on the process so there are no

missteps. Peter also spoke about budgetary constraints that impeded the promotion process. If the promotions were not in the budget, they were not able to promote anyone. “I would also like to think [when you have] seven or eight employees [who are ready to be promoted] . . . [someone] gets promoted, but this past year that was a non-option. It wasn’t budgeted for, so we don’t have the option to promote anyone.”

The interviewees shared individual considerations related to chasing position titles or roles, improper job fit, and personal constraints. Cassandra is completely against employees chasing titles. She wants employees to understand and enjoy the work they perform. She and other managers have had situations in which employees have moved into a new role that was not a good fit. In one instance, she had to tell an employee that there were some critical parts of the role that she was not performing well.

I did tell her that I was concerned that she wouldn’t be able to perform at [this level] . . . because some of these core competencies that are not there. [I told her], “I don’t know if that’s the right path for you.” I don’t know if she owned it or she agreed because the next thing I know she was looking for something else outside of the business. So, it’s hard for me to tell if, that made her say, “forget it.” Some people can either own it or they’ll take it and say “forget it. I just won’t be [in this role] over here. I’m going somewhere else.” I think it was kind of hard for her to hear.

It was important for Cassandra to have a frank discussion with her employee. PFCs should be honest and constructive because these discussions can affect an employee’s performance, and ultimately impact their career. There are times when employees have personal or family situations that impact support for their career.

Madison had a sick spouse for whom she is the primary caregiver, which prevents her from traveling. She believes she still has more to offer the organization, but she feels that after a while management just forgot about her in her role.

No one ever said, “Would you be interested in this? Or would you like to do this? Or this position is open in so-and-so. Is that something that you want to do?” I think at this point in the game, when management looks at me, that I’ve been doing the same thing, more or less, for 10 years, that they figured, “Well, you know what? Let’s not even try.”

Family situations do not always have to limit an individual’s career. Employees should feel comfortable voicing concerns with their manager in order to explore career options that are best matched to their skills and interests.

Participants shared two experiences that demonstrated a connection between the organization and the individual in impacting career conversations: testing out a role and dealing with difficult work relationships. Testing out a role is a hybrid, because it meets individuals where they are and allows for exploration, yet is still bound by the organization. Cassandra made sure that one of her employees received exposure to a role they were interested in before the role became available. She provided projects that were similar to the responsibilities of the desired role to help the employee evaluate their interest.

Samantha was in situation in which her supervisor was a friend and former co-worker. When her friend became her supervisor, Samantha found it difficult to work with her. She felt she was being treated differently as a result of their friendship.

It was very hard when she became my [supervisor] to take the feedback that she would give me. I can remember feeling very irritated with some of the things that she would come to me with, and I'm like, "Is she just nitpicking because are you kidding me?" I think that was one of the only times that I felt like "I don't know how long I can work under this person." She would just tell me no, I couldn't have a day off, just because she didn't want anyone thinking that she was showing favoritism. And I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" I'm like why would that even be favoritism? I have those days.

Even the slightest strain on the manager-employee relationship can have repercussions for career conversations as well as other aspects of the work relationship.

Lastly, promotions are an integral part of career conversations. Ann and Karen received promotions during the time period of our interviews. Ann was surprised by her promotion and welcomed that change.

I was definitely surprised; it really caught me off guard. I like change. Change is good. I really did try and work really hard and keep our clients updated and work through all the cases as fast as possible; really work hard to show that I'm a great worker and that you've made the right decision to have me on your team.

Karen was surprised by her promotion as well. Karen said, "I was very nervous about that because everybody else actually had been on my team longer than me. I was very uncomfortable with that whole idea. But, I mean, if the business thought I deserved it, then I took it for most part." Managers should scan the environment when considering promotions to consider the dynamics of the team, develop strategies for succession

planning, and evaluate the knowledge base and skills of the team. Promotions are generally positive experiences; however, possibilities exist for negative ramifications.

Madison reflected that a promotion she received from a former employer made her “feel great that this person, that I respected so much, had faith in the fact that that they were going to take me from answering the phone to being front line with clients.”

The manager’s role in career conversations is to guide and provide insight for the employee. The initiative, advice, support, planning, and problem solving that take place between managers and employees are critical to having successful career conversations.

***Learning conversations.*** Mentoring, career conversations, performance, and learning are all intertwined. They have causal and reciprocal tendencies in the manager-employee developmental relationship. Learning support from managers and time constraints will be discussed in this section using the experiences of the interviewees.

Learning support from a manager was described in three ways: suggesting educational avenues, learning from the manager, and the manager learning from the employee. Suggesting educational avenues included certifications, encouragement, support, and visits to other departments. Ann, Jasmin, Cassandra, and Pranav all received learning support in the form of educational avenues. Ann’s manager, Naomi, “helped [by] just talking to me about different options and assigning different learning classes that I could take to help me move up.” Cassandra also discussed opportunities to learn with one of her employees.

She really wanted to understand [a few topics], so as a part of her learning, I’ve told her there’s a certification that I want her to look into . . . so she can take that

class. Courses and different things like that that are out there . . . is key to learning something different.

Jasmin had an employee who had never finished her degree, and she convinced the employee to go back and complete the degree.

I kind of talked to her and I said, “First of all let’s work on your degree.” You have an incomplete degree; let’s work on your degree. So she said okay. So she went ahead and enrolled herself into continuing education so now she’s taking classes and she’s very excited. She’s like, “Thank you so much. Because of you, you mentored me, you told me, and I’m going to get this. So I can get my confidence back. I know I can do it.” She has two beautiful kids and she’s like, “I want to do it for them.” I was like, “Good, that’s wonderful.” So she started that and it’s been a year now. She’s been taking classes so she has about three or four years still to go but at least she started in the right direction.

Karen also reported a positive experience with receiving learning support in all her roles at Greystone. “I don’t think I ever had a manager that just refused to be there to support me. I don’t know what that looks like.” She even had the experience at a previous employer of working in different departments to gain an understanding of all the processes of the business. She said she “went into countless meetings, went on client visits, and it really felt like they were taking a big interest in my future.”

There were several occasions in which employees learned directly from their managers. Cassandra, Samantha, and Karen shared experiences in which employees were learning different management styles, managers were describing the learning process, and

learning to be strategic. Karen shared an experience with Cassandra in which she learned to be more strategic with her accounts.

Before coming into the role [Cassandra] told me the direction the role was going in. “We’re not looking for tactical people. We’re really looking for strategic people,” and I got that. I got that you’re not looking for me to come and update accounts; you’re really looking for me to quarterback on an account – responsible for service but responsible from a strategic standpoint and also being able to up-sell to get more hooks into the client and all that. I got that.

So wherein other managers kind of struggled with what that looked like, she actually mirrored what that looked like and whenever we would have conversations they’d be strategic in nature. So even though it may have been a tactical-type issue she knew how to turn that into a more strategic opportunity. I saw how she handled different situations that . . . For instance, a contract; I needed to get a contract signed. I needed to get a contract on file because I didn’t have one. She was talking through that and she was like, “Right now they’re getting a rate increase every single year. If they sign a contract you can negate these rate increases. Over the next two to three years they could be at a static rate and not move because they signed the contract.” And then she told me, “Start using that as leverage to get contracts, so when you tell them two or three years will get you a static rate and it won’t move for the next two to three years based on the contract,” then I was able to tie that into more than just contract negotiations.



Karen quickly adapted to the advice Cassandra provided to manage her accounts in a more strategic manner. When managers provide coaching, teach a skill, or share stories of their experiences with employees, it can strengthen their relationship, particularly when they describe how their advice will impact their employee's results.

Samantha also experienced adapting her style based on working with Cassandra. Samantha said:

So I've gotten a lot of feedback, in the past that, "Oh my God. When you [ask questions], it drove me crazy because I needed the answer and you wouldn't give it to me. However, when I look at it hindsight, I learned so much. With my team lead right now who . . . prior to getting under me she was more just managing the workflow, or making sure we had adequate coverage for the phones, but not really digging in to really understand what was needed by the team. So I forced her to do that.

Samantha: What should I do? When I'm trying to get them to grow or learn, me giving them the answer isn't going to help.

Cassandra: So I'll say, "Okay, well did you . . . did you talk to the client; did you talk to ABC; did you already . . . What did you do? I don't want you to do the work. I need you to put your finger on the pulse to know what's happening. So when someone's coming to you – a new employee is coming to you about something, if you don't know the process, I don't want you to just tell them to go talk to somebody else and ask them how to do it. I need you to understand the process so that you can help grow them and tell them to do this." We had people

who would go to her and [tell her], “Okay, I have this issue,” and she’d say, “I don’t know. Go talk to this person.” I said, “You’re losing credibility – one – because they’re like, “What’s the point of me going to her because all she’s going to do is give me something else?”

Samantha: Well I never had to get involved in the day-to-day and I feel like you’re asking me to get involved in the day-to-day.

Cassandra: I need you to be involved enough so if you don’t know and it’s a new employee – just think through this – a new employee comes to you and says, “Hey, I...” If you don’t know, let’s go together because I want to learn . . . I want to know at least where to go in the future. So I need you to get a little bit closer. So when she comes to me with stuff, I’m doing her the same way. “What did you do? Did you talk to this person? What did they say?” Part of the problem is in this instance what I found is that everybody’s just focusing with just their one little area, right? So all I know is this and I don’t get consumed with operations cause operations are the experts. And then operations say I just do my part; I don’t get consumed with client services. And the problem with that is that clients are . . . you guys are the face to the client, right, so it’s up to you to look out for your clients’ best interests. So you need to know enough or at least ask the right questions so that you understand. And it’s like no, no, no. So just

getting them to . . . to ask the right questions – no, it’s okay to ask questions.

Samantha admitted that it felt awkward, but she ultimately realized the impact of how she was learning and how it was beneficial. “It helped me develop better as a team lead and because you’re giving [guidance] to me in the way, it made me feel like you wanted me to do it.”

Cassandra also shared a story in which she learned from her employee. She had a situation with an employee where she thought a topic they were discussing was common knowledge; however, she discovered the employee was not familiar with the topic.

Cassandra described how the conversation took place:

You’ve been in leadership for this long and you don’t know it? She’s even said to me that, “Okay, Cassandra, I’m learning so much from you. I have to tell you that.” She said, “However, you seem like someone who you may have A, D, and J and you could put the other pieces together.” She said, “I can’t do that. I need A, B, C, D – I need every single piece of the puzzle.” So that’s where I think that I felt like I’m never going to get it like that. And that . . . and that was eye-opening for me because I was like, “Okay, that makes sense.” That makes sense because part of what I was pushing for her and expecting from her is to ask the right questions.

There are times when employees will shed light on a topic or an approach that managers have not considered. Everyone learns at different paces and depths, and in different manners. Managers need to be reminded of this at times for a positive impact on learning.

Constraints on learning may relate to resources, challenging the status quo, or time. In addition to different learning capacities, employees may have internal resource constraints. Cassandra had an employee who hit a roadblock in her learning, and Cassandra she found herself out of options to help the employee's learning.

I've gotten kind of to the point where there isn't anything else I can give her. The job is the job and this is what she's expected to do. I think that this is a hurdle, hurdle or barrier for her. And I don't know how much more I can do to support her. I've told her, "You're going to have to use the resources that you have to, to do the job." She wasn't happy at first. With me she's always kind of like, "Okay, I agree." Her learning is definitely a hurdle and there are no other options for us to do to get her there.

Managers can help their employees identify barriers to learning. They can make suggestions or help the employee talk through how to overcome the barrier, but it is the employee who will ultimately have to make the change.

Another challenge that accompanies learning is maintenance of the status quo. If no one challenges or questions what takes place, learning can be stagnant. Cassandra tried to instill this in her team lead as she taught her to help the team grow. "So now I want you to do the same thing to your team, right, because they're going to grow too. This everybody giving their answer, we're just going to continue to get an answer and we're not even going to know if the answer's right."

Time is a major constraint for employees, especially when it comes to taking training courses. Ann and Pranav shared that their workloads are heavy and this prevents them from taking part in learning opportunities. "We have a lot of cases and we have a lot

of clients who need resolutions, so sometimes it can be hard to fit in the learning piece on top of the work that we have to already complete, or the calls that we're taking. Of course, we always want to make sure that a client is first. That's what I meant in regards to the time constraint." Ann added that during non-peak times there is some time to take courses "if she can fit it in." Pranav echoes that "it honestly just ends up being a time issue." Learning support from managers, employees learning from managers, and the constraints related to learning are topics leaders must consider when working with their employees on learning opportunities. Balancing demands at work can be challenging for leaders as well as employees. Managers should take the lead and serve as stewards and role models, giving proper attention to the demands of the job and to learning, as well as to other facets of the job.

***Performance.*** The performance of an employee is as important as learning, career conversations, and mentoring. Performance could be viewed as the powerhouse of a company. It is the work that employees perform every day that determines performance. Mentoring, learning, and career conversations can be looked at as supporting how someone does work and seeks out new ways to enhance themselves as professionals. This section will discuss interviewees' experiences with how PFCs impact manager-employee relationships, how they provide direction for the employee, and how not having PFCs may influence the manager-employee relationship.

PFCs can have a significant impact on the manager-employee relationship. Ann, Jasmin, and Samantha reported that having these conversations strengthens their relationships and positively impacts performance. Jasmin reported, "It just makes it . . .

every time it makes it better. They open up to me, which is a good thing.” Conversely, Samantha shared that it helped her understand her manager better.

It helped me to understand her better, the way that she was doing things before, during that time where I wanted to scream. I don’t feel like that any more. Maybe I had to go through that with her in order to get to the point where [I am now]. She is there for me and she is wanting me to grow as a leader. She does see that I do have the potential to get to the next level. She’s true to what she said, [such as], “I’m going to be giving you some things that I would normally handle. Let me see how you’re going to handle it.” It helped me to trust that she was going to help me to continue on with my development.

There are many times that they’re giving you this feedback that is more about the business and employees and understanding that not everyone is going to lead the same way, in that you have to be adaptable and you have to be able to flex to their style and that has helped in understanding that sometimes you do have to manage up. They may not managing in the same way that someone else has managed . . . previously.

Samantha was very reflective about her PFCs with Cassandra. They were able to trust one another, which enabled Samantha to grow into a leader. The most important lesson she learned was that everyone manages differences and she has to adapt.

Ann also discussed how helpful it was to have a good relationship with her manager, because “when you feel strong about your management team, it encourages you at work and to be a stronger team leader, a teammate.” Ann expressed how she appreciated the PFCs she had with her manager. In addition, Ann felt PFCs have a

significant impact on the manager-employee relationship and vice versa, noting that they have a reciprocal and direct impact on each other.

Karen, Cassandra, and Madison also discussed the positive impacts of PFCs.

Karen feels very comfortable having PFCs with Cassandra, her manager. Karen feels that she can ask questions to help her understand. “If we’re having a conversation she was giving me feedback in a performance feedback setting, I could easily say, ‘Why do you say that?’ [or] ‘Help me to understand.’” Developing a comfort level between manager and employee takes time. Cassandra overall feels “it has positively impacted it, they know that I’m interested in their development, that I want them to succeed. I always say it’s not about me. Your success is my success so I want you to be successful. So I would say that it’s positively impacted it.”

Madison, another employee of Cassandra’s, explains her loyalty toward and appreciation of Cassandra.

Oh my gosh, I wanted to do everything for her. I wanted to be the one that she said, “Well, let’s get Madison to do it because . . .” I wanted to be the one that got the escalated clients. Because I wanted to do a good job for her and wanted her to look good because I appreciated what she did for me. When you have a manager that you can appreciate, and you have a manager that works with you and supports you, you want to do a good job. You want to be sought out by that manager, you want that manager to say, “Wow, she’s doing a great job,” or “Wow . . . she can do this,” and I think when you have a manager that you respect and takes time to build the relationship with you, there isn’t anything I wouldn’t have done for Cassandra. I would have done whatever she needed me to do.

Sharon was deeply saddened when Cassandra was promoted to another role in another organization. She felt she had a wonderful relationship with her and adored her to no end. This is a testament to the importance of managers who provide support, honest and balanced PFCs, and so much more. The relationship Cassandra was able to build with Madison enabled a high level of loyalty that many managers would envy.

PFCs can also provide direction for employees, helping them plan for development and providing clarity. In the absence of such PFCs, performance would suffer. Naomi feels that PFCs provide direction in the form of development for the employee.

I think it helped me to actually plan better for their development this year. In the conversations I got the people that they're expressing interest truly . . . in their development and they want to know what we are doing for our next step, where do I go to improve from here. Then, there are people that . . . they're kind of happy where they are. It really helped me to see where to focus my energy for the following year.

PFCs can provide a valuable planning tool. There is no use pushing an employee to complete a certification if it is not a requirement for their job, they are meeting or exceeding the expectations of their role, and the business is not changing drastically. In sharing the positive impacts of PFCs, Samantha felt they helped her understand which direction her manager wanted her to go, providing clarity.

If regular PFCs did not occur, several interviewees thought there would be a gap in the alignment of daily activities and goals and a lack of awareness on the part of employees, and it would become an overall struggle to have the PFC. Samantha shared,



“I think that the relationship would be a struggle. I think that is crucial to my success within my role, so it would be pretty hard to work with that person if they were not going to give me any feedback.” When managers do not provide PFCs they create a void in the manager-employee relationship; the employee will not have any idea of how they are performing and neither the manager nor the employee will be able to gauge the success or failure of the employee or team.

**Interactions leave impressions.** This section will explore positive and negative interviewee experiences regarding PFCs. Specifically, the negative impacts of PFCs, PFC challenges that managers face, what happens when no manager-employee relationship exists, and the impact of having or lacking manager-employee relationships will be discussed.

***Positive experiences.*** Interviewees cited two primary reasons for the positive impact of the manager-employee relationship on PFCs: (1) it makes it easier to speak with your manager or employee, and (2) managers provided advice to employees when being transitioned to a new manager. Ann, Cassandra, and Jasmin all shared the same thoughts about the conversation being easier with a relationship intact. Ann said, “I think it makes it easier to discuss anything, really.” Cassandra shared,

I think I had built a relationship with her from the beginning. We would have very candid conversations. I’ve always tried to make sure that I was very approachable.

[I tell my employees] I don’t really care about the titles and all that other stuff, I want you to feel like you could talk to me.

After speaking with several of Cassandra’s employees, it appears that they each have a good relationship with her and feel comfortable speaking with her openly and honestly.

Jasmin reported that PFCs are easier for her and have better outcomes as a result of her relationships with her employees.

it's the kind of relationship that we have . . . not when I'm delivering [annual] performance reviews. They already know. I always . . . every now and then . . . I'll call them once every four weeks or so. I will call them and I'll tell them 'Hey, how are you doing? How is everything?' I'll catch up with them. I know when it comes time for the annual performance reviews I know everything that's going on . . . so I kind of know when I'm delivering it . . . It becomes really easy for me to deliver it. It's just that aura that we create being that comfortable with your employees. It really helps.

Jasmin goes above and beyond to get to know her employees. Karen was a second employee to whom Cassandra gave advice when she (Cassandra) was transitioning to another role. "Cassandra helped me to have those conversations with Mindy. She kind of prepped me in terms of [she has] a different style so your approach should be a little different than what you used with me in the past." The helpful advice Cassandra provided enabled Karen to be a better partner with her new manager, Mindy. Naomi, Madison, Pranav, and Samantha felt it would also make it easier to have a dialogue because the PFC can be a mix of social and professional interaction. Madison said, "Oh my god. You don't quit companies; you quit managers." Her statement underscores the importance of the manager-employee relationship.

***Negative experiences.*** Negative impacts of PFCs reported by the interviewees related to receiving unbalanced reviews and unintended negative impacts. Madison, Pranav, and Ann shared stories related to these themes. Madison had an unfortunate

situation in which she had received glowing reviews from previous managers, then received an annual review from her new manager that included a low rating.

I consistently, every year, got excellent reviews. I mean, just outstanding reviews, every year. Until, I'm thinking it's about four years ago? Maybe it was four years ago. I had a manager that did not like me and she's the first manager in my entire career in the company [who] gave me a poor, and nothing changed in my work ethic. Nothing changed. I did the same thing I always did for every other manager. It was very disheartening.

When managers' styles for collaborating and delegating work differ it presents a hard transition for employees. This is exacerbated when managers do not provide balanced and honest PFCs in the first place, or when expectations for the role are not reset when a new manager starts. Pranav and Ann reflected on their previous roles in sales for another company, where the focus was more on metrics and sales than on development. Pranav's experience was similar to Ann's. "I would definitely have to say about 10 years ago, one of my first jobs right out of college, I was in corporate sales and the performance feedback there was almost non-existent, from a personal development standpoint."

Ann also experienced an unintended negative reaction to an annual PFC in which she feared her manager was trying to get rid of her because he persistently asked her where she wanted to go in her career. It felt aggressive to her at first, but then she realized it was the culture of Greystone.

For a while I was feeling like the calls were kind of to like get you somewhere else. They're always asking questions like, Where do you want to go? and Where

do you see yourself in however long?” For a while it kind of felt like you’re trying to get rid of us, like that’s why you keep asking us these questions.

The negative impacts of PFCs, the PFC challenges managers face, and the impact of having or not having regular PFCs on the manager-employee relationship are key aspects of the manager and employee experiences of PFCs reported by study participants.

There are also negative impacts when there is no relationship between a manager and his or her employees. Jasmin and Peter shared their thoughts based on their experiences. Jasmin said she “would be very uncomfortable if I didn’t have that relationship with the employees, so yes, it would have definitely impacted my delivery.” The look on Jasmin’s face during this conversation conveyed that it was inconceivable to her to not have a relationship with her employees. Peter agreed that it would definitely impact other decisions the manager would make. “If you’re the right-hand man for that manager, having a high co-dependency going both ways, you want to make sure that it’s not affecting them in a negative way.” Positive relationships help PFCs. The absence of a manager-employee relationship would create a void that would make PFCs and the professional setting in general feel awkward and incomplete.

In instances in which regular PFCs do not occur or a relationship has not been developed, interviewees felt that the conversations would be difficult to have, there might be animosity developing in some way, and PFCs that did take place would be more formal. Ann, Cassandra, and Jasmin observed that PFCs would be difficult conversations in this context. Ann said she’d “probably be a lot more quiet . . . probably wouldn’t feel the want or the need to excel. Like you just, because you can’t really talk.”

Cassandra experienced not receiving timely feedback on her performance or development. All the feedback came during the annual review, rather than throughout the year.

I've had some situations where I've had managers myself that didn't really give me timely feedback or didn't really give me feedback or development . . .

developmental-type of direction. It was very sporadic. It was all around just when we had our performance review. I think from my perspective, I wouldn't feel like it would be fair. When you get to the performance assessment time that's something that is documented, that's something on the employee's record, and you didn't give them an opportunity to change. Personally I would have a problem with that. It would be difficult to have someone recollect all the examples that have happened throughout the year of how you came to this assessment.

Cassandra recognizes the implications of PFCs that are not timely. She understands what is fair in terms of feedback more clearly because of her own experiences. Jasmin felt "delivering . . . it would just be so negative, I think delivering that if I didn't have that trust, I would not see the other side of employees, I would only see one side . . . they didn't do this or they didn't do this . . . I wouldn't see the other side."

***Manager challenges.*** Managers face a variety of challenges regarding PFCs.

These range from disciplinary action to employees' denial of poor performance, and from employees who are not the right fit for their roles to overall frustration on the part of the manager and/or employee. Naomi and Cassandra confronted situations in which coaching

was not working and they had to move to disciplinary action. Naomi shared, “we’ve been coaching and trying to get him to perform at minimal levels and he’s just not there.”

Cassandra’s employee was also missing the mark on performance.

It was just so off. His every excuse that he gave was him not taking ownership for it. “No, it wasn’t me; that’s just the client.” It was basic stuff. . . . I went through setting expectations, showing him examples. When he would do something it would be like, “Okay, let’s talk about how you could have done this differently. I just want you to think through this.” And I could find – even from those conversations he just didn’t get it; it just wasn’t like, “Okay, so tell me what you think you can do different.” “Well, I think I did everything I could do.” No. “Okay, so let’s talk about it this way. Here was the result of what you did, right, and that wasn’t what you wanted to have happen. So let’s think of ways we could have prevented that from happening.” The client is just . . . he just would not accept any ownership; he just would not see it. So we ended up going through the performance discipline process.

It is difficult for managers to determine when someone is underperforming and will not improve. While it is good to know this for the business, it can be a challenging situation for the manager-employee. It takes patience, tact, and understanding to resolve these situations. Employees can have a range of responses when there is a negative PFC at hand. Managers interviewed have found these conversations to be difficult and disheartening at times.

Naomi had an employee situation that saddened her because he became unresponsive.

That one is kind of disheartening because he's expressed interest in doing other things and I told him, "Well, this is what you need to do in order to be able to get to a point where you're eligible to explore any other opportunities," and he's just not responding. [I have] mixed feelings. I'm glad he likes what he's doing [now]. It is still disappointing that we couldn't work to get him where he needed to be within the company, within the group because I still think he has good . . . he has good potential for that too.

Sometimes managers and others can see the potential in employees, but the employees cannot see it for themselves. Cassandra had another employee who was not catching on to his role and she thought he might be playing a game with her, because it was hard to believe he did not understand the job.

It was hard because I felt like if he would have just . . . you feel like everybody can learn. You want them to learn from their mistakes. The core basis of what the expectations of his role were and how he serviced and what he did – what I was trying to show him – he just would not see it . . . he just did not get it. It was very frustrating because I [thought], Does this guy just not care? And it was so basic for me that it took me a moment to [think maybe] he just doesn't get it.

Managers can choose to manage the employee out of the organization or find a role that is a better fit, if the employee is willing. Naomi reflected, "If they can get an A, but they're getting a C because of their lack of effort, it's very frustrating." This thought captures the difficulty managers face in these situations.

***The absence of PFCs or the manager-employee relationship.*** There are occasions when short- or long-term PFCs do not occur. The interviewees reported the

following as a result of the absence of PFCs: (1) not having as close a relationship and (2) overall negative impacts, and (3) the absence of PFCs may not impact performance. Ann felt the manager-employee relationship would suffer. “I don’t think that you would have as close of a relationship. I think that’s the drive behind your team. You probably wouldn’t feel as close or have a good – well you can still have a good relationship, but it wouldn’t be as strong of a relationship.”

Jasmin, Madison, and Cassandra shared other general negative impacts. Jasmin believed that without this PFCs, “they won’t come to me for everything or I won’t go to them comfortably.” Their sentiments were that it would overall be more difficult to interact, the manager might be considered a poor manager, or it might seem as if the manager does not care.

Cassandra faced a problem when she took on a new leadership role and discovered that her team had not been provided balanced feedback.

I have managed people before that they’ve been told they were great, great, great, great, or haven’t been told anything for a really long time and then when you come in to try to give them feedback they take it personally because, “You’re the only one who’s told me that so it can’t be true. I think you just don’t like me or we just don’t get along.” I think it would have a short-term and a long-term.

Short-term they would probably say, “Oh, Cassandra’s great.”

When managers do not properly provide feedback it causes negative long-term impacts for the employee. It creates a false sense of performance when managers are not being true to PFCs.



Some participants were unsure whether there would be an impact on their performance if they had no relationship with their manager. Samantha said, “I feel like without that the working relationship would be . . . it would be hard to work with them.” Others felt the absence of the manager-employee relationship would not have an impact on their performance. Some would carry on as usual, because they know how to do their jobs. Others, like Peter and Madison, believed “it would definitely impact my performance, because then I would figure if the manager doesn’t care enough about me . . . I think I would still service my clients, but I may like not do the other stuff.” PFCs have a significant impact on the manager-employee relationship. PFCs provide direction for the manager and employee and the absence of PFCs or the employee-manager relationship, has a negative impact.

**Tending the garden of relationships.** Ownership of one’s role as a manager and the ability to communicate effectively, build trust, and establish mutual respect with employees are essential elements of the manager-employee relationship. In the following sections we will explore these topics more closely.

***Ownership.*** The manner in which managers and employees own their role as a stakeholder in the relationship has a great impact on the success of their partnership. The managers and employees in this study experienced aspects of ownership, trust, respect, and communication in various ways. Ownership of the role or manager or employee is intertwined with trust, respect, and communication when discussing the manager-employee relationship. The two parties influence one another as the relationship ebbs and flows. Managers and employees must each take ownership of their roles to contribute to their relationships.

Pranav felt that his “attitude of being open and showing that I’m open and flexible” helped him cultivate a relationship with his manager. He also “noticed other colleagues [that] don’t necessarily have that kind of attitude . . . you can observe the difference in interaction.” He saw a negative impact on the relationship for employees who did not take responsibility. Pranav believed that a big part of this is “how you approach it and if you show that you’re flexible and can be easy to get along with.” Some managers experience this openness through conversation, e-mails, messaging, and self-assessments.

Cassandra read a self-assessment of one of her employees and discovered that the employee understood and was cognizant of the performance feedback Cassandra had provided during the year. Cassandra had previously questioned whether the employee heard or understood the feedback, as the employee had not indicated any recognition of the feedback in any way other than through her self-assessment. “The fact that she put it on her self-assessment I was like, Oh God, okay, maybe we got through.”

Jasmin attempts to leverage her monthly meetings with her employees to increase communication and establish shared responsibility between her employees and herself.

I focus on monthly development planning. I was like, “It’s your responsibility, and you will have to set that meeting up with me.” I’m not going to run around to you every month saying, “Okay, let’s do development planning. Let’s go.”

They’ve been doing that. They set up a meeting with me [and] . . . I have an open door policy. It’s like anytime you want to discuss anything, please do. Don’t hesitate, just set up a time with me, and call me when I’m free, so they’ve been doing that.

Jasmin makes herself as available as possible and invites her team to take the opportunity to meet with her.

Pranav reflected:

Honestly speaking, I think it's a combination of both parties extending something to that relationship in terms of, from my perspective, the employee, listening to—if my manager is constructive feedback, taking that in a positive manner, and then utilizing it. And also, committing to work as—my job function describes giving my proper effort. Then I think from a manager's perspective that if they extend better appreciation to the employee, and [show] genuine care and concern, that helps to kind of foster open communication.

Pranav provided an excellent description of how managers and employees should accept and own their roles in their developmental relationship.

***Trust and respect.*** Trust and respect are established when managers and employees are honest with one another. Finding a balance between delegation and oversight for managers can be challenging. If trust or respect disintegrates from either the manager's or employee's perspective, it could harm the relationship.

Cassandra, Samantha, Jasmin, and Peter experienced building trust in different ways. Cassanrda had two events that she wanted to share.

Having that relationship builds trust, they may not like what I say, but they trust and I'm not going to sugarcoat it . . . I'm not good at sugarcoating, but at the same time it builds trust in a relationship, which then I think helps them to know exactly what's expected and that I'm there to support them no matter where they go.

Cassandra is very straightforward when she interacts with her employees. In addition, she knows that to build trust, you have to be able to be vulnerable to an extent in manager-employee relationships:

You have to trust to some degree. I mean there's one thing to have a title and all this other . . . but that doesn't mean that someone is going to respect your opinion or where you're coming from or even take it, with a grain of salt, right? So, having the relationship of trust and support kind of helps them to look at things a little bit differently. Now I'm not saying all the time they do that . . . I think the relationship does help.

The relationship can help as Cassandra described, but it is not the only component of a healthy manager-employee relationship. Samantha shared her thoughts on trust in her relationship with her manager, Cassandra.

I think the trust is there and she understands where I'm coming from . . . I've had to give her some feedback [after] I've asked her to sit in on one of my one-on-ones with someone that was having a performance issue and they walked out. Samantha felt comfortable enough to provide her manager feedback, which demonstrates their level of comfort built by trust. They are able to balance their respective work roles as well as being open for meaningful feedback.

Jasmin shared from a management perspective that she consciously tries to give her employees space to do their work independently, empowering them as a means of building trust.

by giving them their space, not micromanaging them. I think the manager that was there before, [there] was too much micromanaged, right? Every little thing

that they did, every little [thing] . . . cases that they didn't get through, they were getting asked, and some of them came to a point where they were just going to leave. When I took over, and I don't work that way. If my manager did that to me I would be a little uncomfortable. I wouldn't be able to perform the way I am today. I wouldn't be as productive. I said, "Okay, what, first we'll just start clean. I'm the new manager, my style is different, right, so let's get used to each other first." That's how I built up the trust. If they tell me something, "Hey, Jasmin, this is what . . ." I don't question it . . . if it's genuine, we are adults . . . we're not kids.

Jasmin believes in building trust by not micromanaging her employees. She understood that the group had a negative experience with the previous manager and knew things had to change in order to build a relationship of trust with her new team.

Not all managers are like Jasmin. Some are more self-serving, thinking more of themselves and their own ambitions than about building trust with the team. Madison, an employee, shared her perspective on managers whose behavior appears self-serving and suggests that they do not care about their employees.

I've had managers that just **DON'T** care  
 They have their **OWN** agendas  
 I've got some firsthand experience about that  
 When you have an idea or when you go to them with a process improvement  
 and they tell you  
 "Well, that's not really in, that's not really something that we're looking at.  
 I'll take it into advisement."  
**THEN** somewhere down the road, you find what you brought to your manager  
 actually had been implemented by your manager and **YOU'RE** just not in the  
 picture  
 Yeah  
 I've had that happen to me a few times, outside of Greystone and within  
 Greystone.  
 It's the manager that is **CONSISTENTLY** late for your meetings . . .  
 your one-on-ones with them

**CONSISTENTLY** reschedules because they have too many things that are going on

It's the **MANAGER** or the **TEAM LEAD** that will talk about other **EMPLOYEES**

and say, "Well, **SO-AND-SO** was doing this and **SO-AND-SO** was doing that, and I never have to hold **SO-AND-SO'S** hand to do this process and I can't

**BELIEVE**

you didn't **THINK** of this to begin with and **WHY** are you coming to me with this when **YOU** should know how to do this."

*Those managers that don't give you the time that you need*

**OBVIOUSLY** if, if you've got someone coming to you with a question on a process or a question on how something should be handled, **YOU WOULDN'T BE DOING THAT IF YOU DIDN'T NEED THEIR INPUT**

If they're coming to you, you can't, you can't sit there and **SAY**,

"Well **THIS** is something that you should have **KNOWN**,"

because obviously if you're there (and you're asking a question), you don't know.

Some managers **DON'T** take the time that is there...

**DON'T** take the time

**DON'T** take the time

**YOUR** relationship with them is not that **IMPORTANT** because if it **WAS** important, **YOU** wouldn't sit *there* and be **CONSISTENTLY** late for *every* meeting that you have with them. **YOU** wouldn't sit there and **ANSWER** e-mails on your blackberry while someone is giving you **100%** of their time

**THIS** is a **REAL experience**

**I'M** here **GIVING** you 100% of **MY TIME** and I truly don't appreciate **YOU** answering e-mails because obviously you're **NOT GIVING** me 100% of **YOUR TIME**

And when *they* **LOOK** at you and **SAY**,

*"Well, my e-mails just keep coming and my Blackberry keeps on pinging"*

And then **MY** response is,

"Well, **MAYBE** you shouldn't **BRING** your Blackberry to **YOUR** meeting."

I mean **WHO** am I to **TELL** a **MANAGER** that?

**WHY** should **I** be put in a situation to **TELL . . .** a **MANAGER** that?

Madison drew on a variety of experiences with managers and she was quite frustrated.

She felt she was giving more time, attention, trust, and empathy than her managers,

which ignited her anger. Managers should try their best to aware of their actions as they

interact and seek to build trust with their employees.

*Communication between managers and employees.* Communication between

managers and employees is foundational to their relationship. The employees interviewed

identified two important variables related to communication: differing modes of communication and varying levels of openness. Manager-employee relationships can be leveraged to provide candid performance feedback and to help ease managerial transitions. The way in which employees and managers cultivate their relationship can help in many situations that would be awkward if the manager or employee failed to fulfill their respective responsibilities for a healthy relationship. We will continue to dive deeper in the feedback conversations between managers and employees to investigate how PFCs enhance the manager-employee relationship.

Ann, Jasmin, Pranav, and Karen shared experiences of open and honest communication. Ann, an employee, shared that her manager “sends emails as well, but I think the most ‘informing’ is during our one-on-ones. We’re actually talking . . . just her and I. I think it’s easier when you talk about things instead of doing it through email.” Everyone has their own preferred modes of giving and receiving information, and Ann prefers face-to face, which provides the greatness amount of non-verbal and verbal communication.

Jasmin, a manager, asks her employee questions to engage them.

If stuff’s not going to go well [the team says], “I know Jasmin’s going to call us.” . . . and when I do that I don’t tell them why did you do this, otherwise it gets defensive. Right? So, I just say, “Okay, can you help me understand what happened over here? Where was the gap? Was it us . . . that we didn’t follow through?” or “What happened over here?” Sometimes they’ll be honest. They’ll say, “Okay, what, I’m not going to make excuses. I didn’t complete my task,” or “I didn’t follow up on the deadline,” or “I didn’t follow up with the client.”

I'll say, "It's okay. We're all human beings, and we can [make mistakes], but just keep in mind that some of these clients are very sensitive and they probably have a direct line to [our CEO]." That's how I deal with my employees. When I was [in an individual contributor role my managers] would come back and say, "Okay, what happened here?" And just like act [they are] in your face and that's when you're defensive . . . [their] personality comes out and you're like, "Okay, well I didn't do this so why don't you check this or check that." I remember a couple of my managers used to do that to me.

Jasmin asks questions so her employees will not "finger-point" and encourage an environment where some mistakes can be tolerated. As a result of her experiences, she feels she can gain more by not singling out employees, but instead focusing on educating them about potential opportunity costs if things are not done correctly.

Pranav believes that the way PFCs are facilitated is a function of the manager-employee relationship.

I've know some other people having not-so-pleasant experiences in their reviews. Luckily I've not had that experience. I think it's been a function of the relationship that I had with my manager. I think this transcends my career here at Greystone. I could also speak for my past roles as well, when I've had my reviews. I think if you have that open and honest feedback on a day-to-day basis, then those reviews are just an extension of that existing relationship.

Pranav believes that having PFCs throughout the years that are honest helps the overall relationship and the ongoing conversations.



Karen shared an experience that echoes Pranav's experience. Karen describes a situation in which she was provided feedback from her managers about an opportunity she had to showcase her skills.

[My manager] gives me a lot of feedback. I had a big meeting with my vice president and her managers. When I went to the meeting, I felt more casual with them [when I presented]. Afterward, my manager talked to me and said, "You really surprised me. Usually you do not have a problem communicating and that is your sweet spot. You seemed too relaxed . . . you didn't bring it." They wanted to see what the client actually sees when I go out to their site. [So I had another opportunity to present] with a different group. The feedback [from my manager was] that is great . . . she said, "Don't ever change up your sweet spot. What you're able to bring to the table and what you do well, you should always bring to the table no matter what." That was just a little different because I [had a former manager who] would always tell me to gauge my audience. I'm saying all [this] to say that she's so willing to provide feedback and to help me in areas that she may feel I'm struggling in.

The feedback from both managers was helpful for Karen. Now she has to decide when to use the information that has been provided to her. These conversations provide some insight into the level of comfort and openness Karen had with both managers.

The manager and employee relationship can also be helpful in times of transition. Madison received help when her manager left the department for another position. She recalled, "When [Malcom] left to go to [another department], I was very upset because I finally felt that I had gotten a manager that I worked really well with."

Madison: I don't know Cassandra. I don't know where she's coming from. I knew she was a director and she took a step down, and that right there made me nervous. . . . I want you to transfer me under [Amy] (Cassandra's counterpart).

Malcom: I'm not going to do that to you. You need to be careful what you wish for.

Madison: Okay.

Madison continued,

And then so there was a downtime in between [Malcom] and Cassandra. I guess when Cassandra had to come over and [Malcolm] had to go to his new job. So and I reported directly to [Amy]. I like [Amy] very much as a person. As a manager, she is blah. I thanked him. [Cassandra] is better.

In both cases the managers were proactive when attempting to minimize the disruption of the transition to a new manager by providing insight. Karen's case was more direct than Madison's, but both managers had foresight. This demonstrates their level of awareness and concern for the team's success, even when they are transitioning out of the manager role.

**Sage advice for chiefs.** Communicating with employees, forming bonds, and creating a team environment are important priorities for leaders to keep in mind in relation to PFCs and developing their overall relationship with their employees. The following section will explore this further using the interviewees' shared experiences.

***Communication and dialogue with employees.*** Open communication between managers and employees needs to be supported by respect and honesty. When the parties

do not respect one another, the results can be damaging. Madison shared her thoughts on why managers need to be respectful.

There needs to be respect; no one is going to react well to being intimidated.

Yelling doesn't work. And don't ever point your finger at somebody. Yes—be respectful for the person that you're dealing with cause even though that person may have messed up something . . . It doesn't give you the right to degrade them any more than they already [are]. Cause if they've screwed up and the job means something to them, they already feel terrible. I mean, I'm not saying make everything all, all roses and rainbows, but there's a way to reprimand somebody without tearing them down and yelling at them.

Respect is essential to the manager-employee relationship. It is yet another important component that influences open communication and dialogue.

Samantha and Naomi both had experiences that supported the theme of open communication. Naomi discussed some advice she would give leaders as they converse with employees.

[Having a conversation] not always about work, but how's everything going because you can't always have that face to face, so that would be some of the advice and if you are in the same location with them if you're on one side of the building and they may be on the other, but continuously bringing in . . . having that open dialogue with them and communication, you got to do that I think in order to be able to get them on board so that they want to perform and they're not demotivated.

This is the engagement she describes exists in her relationship with her own manager. Samantha is able to provide her manager feedback with a level of comfort.

I have had to give her some feedback as well . . . And I can tell that when I give her the feedback, be it from the team or something that she may want us to do and I'm like, "Okay, wait a minute." Let me give you another perspective. . . that would be a little bit too harsh for them to do or that might not be something that we want them to have to come in here on a Saturday to work for eight hours . . . So I think that giving her that type of feedback . . . she'll take it because we have built the relationship. I said I just wanted them to know that the manager was there . . . and that we're on the same page. We may need to just talk about [the manager's] level of severity when you're [speaking] to them. And she was okay with that too. She's had to tell me [too], No, you need to be harder.

Samantha describes how she has reached a point in her relationship with her manager that they can provide feedback to one another while maintaining a level of respect for each other's role. Her manager is still the lead for the group, but they are able to provide one another with respectful and honest feedback.

Samantha and Naomi emphasized the need for both managers and employees to be present in PFCs. Naomi said:

Multitasking is not an advantage in those kinds of conversations. We had a class last year with a lady they brought in to teach us time management. One of the skills that I took away from the class that really has helped is to turn around [and face the person you are meeting with]. Don't look at your email, don't look at these things, because you're having a conversation that you're not really focused

on. You may get some points but you're going to miss the nuance [of the conversation].

It can be hard to tune out distractions from email, phones, and even one's own thoughts; however, being present in the conversation can provide so much more context and interaction for both parties.

***Build bonds with employees.*** There are a variety of ways in which bonds can be built between managers and employees. Interviewees shared a number of experiences with getting to know a manager or employee, tips on things to do, and the results of active engagement and building bonds. Managers and employees can get to know each other better if they are open to having a relationship, demonstrate the value of the relationship, remain flexible, and maintain a balance between formality and informality.

Madison, Pranav, Samantha, Naomi, Karen, and Cassandra shared ways managers can get to know employees. Madison remarked that managers “don't [need to] be my friend.” She added that it is all right to have a professional relationship and integrate some personal information, but it does not have to become a friendship. Pranav also discussed his preferences for developing professionals relationships.

building those bonds, I think engaging in informal activities . . . not necessarily team-building activities, but maybe you go out for lunch with a few people on your team every now and then and just kind of get to know them outside of the office. Just try to get to know them as people.

Sometimes it is challenging to build these bonds because of the manager's and employee's respective statuses in the organization. The culture of an organization, as well as the personality of the manager, can drive employee assumptions about how they

should interact with their manager. Pranav thought that managers should “work to build those bonds informally.” He continued,

A lot of times when you have that manager-subordinate relationship, the subordinate feels some sense of apprehension or fear towards the manager . . . and if the leadership can work on kind of breaking down those barriers by having informal bonds and things of that nature, that helps the subordinate perform better and they’re more open to feedback. It can be as simple as engaging in casual conversation, but again the caveat there being not casual conversation for conversation sake [of it] but genuine interest . . . “Hey, how are you?” Outside of work, basically. Or if you notice something, offer a genuinely interested reaction versus a canned reaction. It’s hard, I know, at some levels of management given the constructs of the environment and sometimes that’s difficult, but you have to make an effort.

During the course of the work day or outside of work, managers can take the opportunity to build bonds with their employees. It takes effort on the part of the manager and employee to do this.

Samantha shared similar thoughts about building a relationship with her manager. Referring to PFCs, she noted that, “during those conversations that you are building a relationship.” Jasmin applied lessons she learned from a past manager to build bonds with her employees.

Every one of my employees, I keep in touch with them personally. Every week I have a conversation with them, just to see how they are doing, not just, “You didn’t do this or, your work didn’t do this.” [I want] to see how they’re doing,

how is everything, what can I do to help them, or help them even progress even more. I think having that attitude—the manager never made me feel like, “Okay, I’m superior to you. You are going to do what I tell you.” [He said,] “No, let’s figure this out together.” That’s the way he put it to me. It’s not like, “I’m your manager and you’re supposed to do what I tell you.”

Naomi takes a similar approach to forming bonds with her employees, even though she has a large number of employees directly reporting to her.

I try to develop a personal relationship with each person, which can be difficult when you have 21. I’m trying to learn something personal about them so it’s not just when we get together we’re getting together about either an issue or something you need to do on a task.

Samantha found when she reported to a new manager that there were differences from her past manager and she had to adapt.

I thought it was going to be a little bit more difficult working with her than it is. I don’t know if it’s because I’ve matured some in my professionalism . . . just adapting to different styles of management. I thought in the beginning it was going to be a little bit harder, but it really wasn’t. I wasn’t sure if I was meeting her expectations. It hasn’t been as hard working for her as I thought it would be. She is rough. I think it’s not as hard because I just know that and I try and do exactly what she’s asking. I feel like she’s actually trying.

Samantha’s level of awareness, based on the insight provided by her previous manager before she transitioned out of the organization, had been helpful. Samantha is aware of her ability to work with and be successful under her manager.

Jasmin, Madison, Karen, and Cassandra shared additional experiences that focused on how they enhanced their relationships with their managers or employees. Jasmin is very passionate about her employees and the need to build relationships with them.

I know that I take pride to say that I value each and every one of my employees. They know that. They all have their own little strengths and weaknesses but we've worked with their weaknesses in a positive manner. I just value each and every one of them. I think I've been lucky to have such a great team. They really like the little personal things I do . . . I just pick up the phone. Sometimes it's just informal, not a set up meeting. I just call them to see how they're doing. "Hey, how is it? Did you have a good weekend? Did you have a good vacation?" They really think that, "Hey, my manager cares about me."

When I call them, I understand what they're going through. Sometimes yes we're all human beings, they'll call and just complain, complain, complain – I just listen and then I'll be like, "Okay, what is the best way to approach this? You tell me what is the best way that works for you . . . and let me see if I can help you with that." If that is not something that's feasible I'll be straight out with them and I'll be like, "Okay now let's look at it another way. This is not going to be something that we can do." I'm very straightforward with them. I don't like to keep things from them where they're like hidden behind the scenes or whatever. I'm very straightforward with them.



Jasmin shows that she cares about her employees in many ways. For example, she tries to be flexible with her employees when they experience a crisis or other personal situation that needs time to be resolved.

One of my employees was very rough when they started, they used to call off a lot of days and just not performing as they were supposed to. So I sat down with them and I kind of wanted to understand what's going on first. I just don't throw things at them and say, "Why did you do this?" or "Why did you...?" I just wanted to understand what's happening with them. So they came back and said there was lots of personal stuff going on.

Jasmin: Well, how can I help you? We all have personal lives and I understand that; however, this is impacting your performance; this is impacting on your day-to-day stuff that you do at work. So what is that you want me to help you out with?

Employee: Well, I just need a little more time to kind of get myself together and then I can have things figured out with the family and stuff.

Jasmin: Fine. I'll work with you with that during that time frame; I'll work with you. You do whatever it takes. If you want to take some extra time here and there, one hour here and there, I'm not going to look into all that. I'm not going to be all detailed stuff about that. Once you get your stuff figured out then we need to talk about how we need to keep it consistent and you can get your performance on the right track.

Employee: Fine. Thank you so much.

Employee: (After that period of time) I think I've gotten things straightened out and I thank you very much. I appreciate all the help that you have given me.

Now, they're one of, if not the top, the second top performer. If they want to discuss something, if they have a question, or something, they say, "Oh, Jasmin, we need to ask you this question . . ." It's like oh, yeah, we can talk, so I think I respect them and they respect me. I put myself in their shoes and say "Okay . . . it's a partnership. We're in this together. It's not like me against you or anything.

We're in this together. The success of the team is the collaboration of the team.

Jasmin, within reason, tries to be flexible with her employees. This paid off for Jasmin, in that this employee was high performing later on.

Karen appreciated that her manager, Cassandra, provided her feedback in the form of encouragement. Cassandra reminded Karen that she had a lot to share with others and she should share her knowledge to help individual teammates and the overall team to improve. "She said, You have so much to offer in terms of developing someone that may be underdeveloped. I want you to embrace that more because you have so much to give." Karen appreciated this compliment and was grateful for the feedback and her strong relationship with her manager.

Madison reflected on her experience at a past employer and the openness of one of her managers, noting how that impacted how she "took up" her position.

He was very down-to-earth, open with where the company was going and his vision for the company, along with the owner's. I just think that when you have a manager that works as hard as you do and [you] have a shared vision with where

the company is going, and what they expect from you, I think that has a lot to do with if you buy-in to that job.

Cassandra also seeks to maintain the kind of openness with her employees that Madison experienced. She realizes that as a manager she has the final say; however, she enjoys having an open relationship with her employees.

At the end of the day . . . I want to hear what you have to say [and] I'm going to make the decision. I try to [have an] open relationship with all of my direct reports – that it's like I want you to feel comfortable enough to say anything.

Managers can take a variety of avenues to build bonds with employees.

The results of developing strong bonds between managers and employees can be significant. Cassandra had a situation with an employee and one of her managers in which the bond between the employee and manager was weak, and she had to serve as an intermediary to resolve the situation. This employee disagreed with the results of her annual performance review and escalated it to HR. After listening to the employee, Cassandra discovered that the employee had not been made aware that an infraction earlier in the year was major enough to impact her annual performance review. When Cassandra spoke to the manager, she said:

Okay, so here's what I heard constantly . . . her say that she didn't know. Yes, you may have told her once but she didn't know it was still a problem. You never addressed it with her again. Her behavior impacted someone else on the team and you gave her an example she never knew about.

It was clear to Cassandra that the manager had not properly communicated with the employee and that she needs to provide this manager with some coaching. When she

started to provide feedback to the manager, explaining that after hearing both sides of the story she believed the manager should remove the infraction from the review because proper communication had not taken place with the employee, Cassandra noticed that the manager was upset and disagreed with her. The manager responded:

No, that's not it . . . what you guys do . . . what they do around here . . . it's just . . . it's all about the employee and whenever they dispute something then that's what happens, and I don't think it's right, and you should just agree with me.

Cassandra explained to her manager that she supported him but that they needed to focus on how to move forward. She tried to reason with her manager by conveying that it was their responsibility as leaders to do what was right and fair by employees.

Cassandra shared:

It took many conversations to get there. As we went through that though I got a little frustrated because it's like, really? So it was difficult, and I think that the longer we have a relationship together the more we'll get there sooner.

If the manager had had a better relationship with the employee, or at a minimum better communication, the feedback provided in the annual performance review might not have been a surprise. Cassandra noticed in this manager's own self-assessment that a small part of the message she was trying to convey was included. It wasn't all that Cassandra hoped to impart, but it was a portion of it.

It's funny because when we got to her performance review there were some other things that had happened earlier as well as throughout the year, little small things here and there, even in her self-assessment she put something in there that I had

shared with her about how she communicates and manages her team . . . and so I know something sunk in.

Although it was early in the relationship Cassandra was attempting to build with her manager, it appears that she made some inroads. Managers can have different styles. Madison shared her thoughts on management styles, lamenting Cassandra's departure when she transferred to a different job.

I think with management there are two types of managers. There's either the manager that is concerned about where they are going, how their career path is flowing, and then there's managers that are concerned with who reports to them and makes efforts with mentoring their employees to help them realize or follow their career paths. [In turn], those managers inevitably advance in their own career path because they grow from the opportunity to let those who report to them grow. I've had other managers where every need that you have was in reason. I got to tell you, Cassandra is like that. She'll sit down and if she thinks you should know something, she'll go over it with you and say, "I'm surprised you haven't had this opportunity before, but let's talk about it. Perhaps you've forgotten or perhaps you didn't handle it yourself." I miss Cassandra. I got to tell you.

Building bonds with employees takes effort and time, and managers should use a variety of ways to get to know and interact with their employees.

***Creating a team environment and accessibility.*** Managers can create a team environment in many ways, including encouraging the sharing of knowledge, being easy to get along with, and serving as an example for others. Pranav and Jasmin shared their

thoughts on creating and being part of a team environment. Pranav discusses the benefits of having a team environment.

Not just with my manager, but with your colleagues as well, it helps because we, and this is more basic than anything else . . . if you're easy to get along with people will be more open to talk to you. They'll be less hesitant thinking they may offend you or something of that sort.

When camaraderie has been fortified by fostering teamwork, fewer negative interactions are likely to occur.

Jasmin, who is also an advocate for teamwork, notes,

We're a team; we are going to work together on this, not against each other. I carried that over with me, wherever I went. I have had a few positions within the 13 years that I have had with Greystone. My employees know they can just come and talk to me about anything. It's not just because I am a manager.

This is simply the way Jasmin operates; she prides herself on cultivating a team environment and having bonds with all of her employees.

While encouraging a team environment, managers must also manage their boundaries with their employees. Jasmin says, "Yes, we have our boundaries, there has to be boundaries, HR related—and they know not to cross over that boundary." She is very realistic about what she can and cannot do for her employees.

They know that if they come to me things will be taken care of, I will back them up. I will explain to them why things cannot be done, because if they come to me, and ask for something that I cannot give, I'm realistic. They know I'm very

straightforward and they know if there is something [going on], I will not keep something from them.

It appears as if Jasmin's team accepts her as part of the team as well. She and her team completed the Myers-Briggs assessment and her employees acknowledged her as being part of the team. Pranav said, "We don't feel that Jasmin is a manager; we feel like she is a part of the team. She likes to work things with us and experience the things that we do." Jasmin wants to keep things this way, as she finds it very productive. She knows, and her team knows, that "I'm not a perfect human being; I also make mistakes. So I reach out to them for their input. As a team, we all share a lot with each other, and that's fine." This is a good example of the positive results of creating an environment that supports teamwork.

Reinforcing the team environment requires that managers put in the effort. Jasmin and Samantha shared their experiences in regard to this endeavor. When Jasmin was explaining to her team about the organizational changes that were taking place, specifically adding an overseas team to the group, it was her job to help them understand the implications. Had she not built a solid relationship with her team, it could have been a more difficult conversation. "I explained to them and they were kind of insecure about it, but now they understand that it's not that they're not going to have jobs; it's just like we're going to take the work back." She tries to "always have that open door policy," which helps to support her team environment.

Samantha agrees that leaders need to be accessible to their teams.

You shouldn't shut yourself off because some leaders, and especially now with the whole [virtual environment they need to make] sure that they understand that

you are available and that you are there constantly, like scheduling that time outside of like a normal one-on-one but just to kind of check in.

Creating a team environment requires managers to be active participants in their employees' performance and development. Taking an active role also means encouraging others to share knowledge, being a team player, and demonstrating the behaviors they want their employees to emulate. The leadership shown by managers by communicating with employees lays the groundwork for an optimal team environment and impacts the creation and maintenance of the manager-employee bond.

**Research Question 3: What conditions are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture?**

Supporting the agility of an organization is important to be successful in the marketplace. The conditions that are necessary to integrate performance feedback conversations into organizational culture are having processes and structure in place; creating awareness of the existing culture; navigating implementation, ongoing support, and reinforcement of desired PFC behaviors; and understanding an organization's limitations.

Table 20

*Research Question 3 Meta-findings, Themes, and Codes.*

Meta-Findings	Themes	Code Categories
Navigate: Supporting the agility of the organization	1. Processes to support participation at all levels	44000 Good conceptual information developed
		350000 PAS positively supporting PFCs
		370000 PAS training and employees
		380000 PAS training needed for managers
		390000 Positive comparison of PAS to other companies
	2. Goal setting	320000 Challenges with goals and PAS



		360000 PAS supporting measurable goals
	3. The performance assessment system	49000 Structure for performance management
		310000 Accessing PAS
		330000 Comparison of old and new PAS
		340000 Impact of changing performance systems
		390000A Usage of the PAS
Recognize and innovate: Moving ocean liners with oars	4. Maneuver Large Company Challenges	43000 Engagement
		45000 Improvement needed between departments
		46000 Limitations within a large company
Understand and safely challenge: The main event- The business model versus the people.	5. Match external client service with internal culture	41000 Business model financially driven
		47000 Pleasing clients
		48000 Quality trainings to promote client focus, etc.
	6. Needs basic training	110000 Difficult PFC conversations
		120000 Manager challenges having 1:1's
		130000 Offloading managerial duties
		140000 Success with managers having 1:1's

**Navigate: Supporting the agility of the organization.** The processes that support participation, goal setting, and the performance assessment system (PAS) all have important roles in organizational agility. Each of these processes may have positive or negative impacts based on how they are implemented, introduced to employees and leaders, and sustained over time. In this section, these topics will be discussed using data collected from the organization as well as from the interviews.

***Processes to support participation at all levels.*** It is important for organizations to provide a good conceptual framework of processes, training, and tools to support employees. Karen observed, “At Greystone we have some very good stuff conceptually. The Performance Assessment System (PAS) that Greystone utilizes was implemented a

few years ago and has made progress in leveraging the PAS system to support PFCs.

Ann, Jasmin, Pranav, and Peter also shared their insights regarding Greystone's PAS and employee training. Ann noted that the online learning classes "are very helpful . . . when you have time to take them, they're very informative, so definitely helpful."

On the other hand, not everyone felt it was an intuitive system, given that it was such a big change from the previous PAS. The last PAS was entirely manager driven; everything was completed by the manager, from goal setting to annual performance reviews. Employees didn't have to enter any information or keep anything up to date. The self-assessment was a Microsoft Word template that was provided to them by their manager. Thus there was no direct interaction between the previous system and non-managers. As a result, Jasmin felt that her employees did not understand the purpose or functionality of the new PAS.

The new system that we have, they really didn't get it. It didn't stop me, but yes, some of the employees were like, "What was the purpose of us using this? We already have our own one-on-one and that's fine, but what's the purpose of this?" They just didn't understand that.

Pranav, on the other hand, viewed the new system as a great improvement over the previous system. In comparison with the systems used by other companies he has worked for, he finds this to be the most comprehensive.

I've been impressed by the system here. I think it's been one of the more detailed tools and it's been a bit more in-depth than I have experienced at other companies. We did our reviews. You have opportunities in the tool where you can push out each metric of a goal in terms of, "Okay, I want to improve in x way."

And it's, "Okay, this is the percentage that will be for my overall job function."

Or this is something that is a part of my job function, and it's, let's say, 50% of my job functions. So, I know that I need to focus more on this skill, because over half of my job duty, basically.

Employees had varying reactions to the system. Peter found the new system helpful and mentioned what he would like to see in terms of future upgrades to system or process changes in general. "I would probably say that we need more recommendations for training or to find out areas that need strengthening. I know that [another department] has recommended courses to take." It is important to have tools to support employees, and organizations should understand that there are varying levels of understanding and progress when it comes to leveraging these tools. An effort should be made to understand and plan for varying levels of adoption and maturity when working with a new PAS.

Training for managers falls along the same lines as training for employees. Naomi and Jasmin shared their thoughts on PAS managerial training. Naomi stated, "I think engaging HR more and helping to teach managers how to use the system. I don't think we do that well enough." Given the fast-paced environment of the business, some managers are perpetually playing catch-up with daily work and managing their people. Jasmin and her peers also made the suggestion to her manager to bring in HR to assist.

We made a suggestion to my boss, Joseph, and not just me, all the other managers. I think he's asked HR to come in and give us an overview of how to do this. What is the responsibility of the employee? What is the responsibility of the manager? Mostly the employees create their own tasks and the managers will

follow up with them or give comments on that and that kind of stuff. So that was lacking.

As Ann mentioned earlier, there are courses to help employees and managers understand the system, but that does not seem to be the only support managers or employees need. Naomi shared, “Now there’s some classes that are out there and I have been scheduled since the system came online – a year and a half ago. I have yet to look at it.” There need to be other avenues for leaders and managers to learn the PAS or be accountable to someone to learn how to use it.

In addition to using the system, Naomi also shared that it is important for managers to know how to write and articulate their thoughts when delivering PFCs.

I think it kind of goes with the training. It’s having some level of training on how do you develop, deliver . . . how do you deliver a bad one; how do you deliver a good one; how do you grade those. [Having the ability] to have those conversations [is important] because everybody has different levels of capabilities within them. It would be nice if everybody had at least a baseline training.

Planning the educational delivery of a PAS system takes considerable effort, organization, and flexibility to meet learners where they are and be vigilant enough to correct course (provide different resources) when necessary.

**Goal setting.** Managers and employees noted that there needs to be a considerable amount of education and flexibility within an organization to help its learners utilize the PAS. More specifically, the ways goals are set for each individual is an area in which both the managers and employees interviewed shared a variety of feedback. When Greystone rolled out their new PAS, it was the first time employees had a chance to set

their own goals. Ann said, “I’ve been in and set the goals and that was probably my first experience with setting up my personal goals.”

Pranav described his positive experience with the new PAS.

Well, actually I think the tool has been very, very solid in terms of the level of detail and being able to draw down to specific and measureable. I would say, line items of different behaviors or different specific outcomes. I think it’s been—it’s been great.

Not everyone had the same experience as Pranav, however. Naomi and Cassandra commented that the system did not quite align with how the company typically managed goals. Naomi said, “The way Greystone does goals and things – don’t necessarily feed into it well.” She is referring to the objectivity and measurement of the goals. In the past, Greystone has used a more subjective approach to providing performance feedback. While the new system does allow for both objective and subjective feedback, the direction was given during the rollout for the goals to be more objective and measurable. Cassandra echoed Naomi’s comment, asking, “How can you measure that? So that’s the part that I think is a struggle in the organization. Organizationally it’s like no, I don’t think this is a good task (when it’s measurable).”

Naomi and Cassandra both believe the goals and tasks for fiscal appraisal need to be measurable and have shared similar frustrations with going against the status quo. Cassandra shared her frustration in trying to be an advocate for specific and measurable goals.

One of the things that I’ve brought up to my manager and everyone is just the goals and how you do the tasks underneath the goals. Making sure that they’re

very specific instead of vague like they were before. I've just felt that we're still kind of stuck in some of the old objectives and tasks. Because we'll (managers) come up with some of the stuff and its like, mm, no, how do you measure that? The only thing I could say is just to constantly reiterate that the tasks need to be something that's measured.

Naomi had a similar experience when she was trying to collaborate with her peers on setting goals. She was a proponent of balancing quality and measuring success. She saw some progress in how her peers have been evolving their performance goals. However, she realizes that it is not only about hitting a number; it is also about how the goal is executed by the employee.

I still don't think we're where we need to be, but they're tied much more closely to what their performance review goals are. So in the past we had case aging . . . to me you hit a point where you're not getting service level, you're just getting a number. In fact you're getting more escalations and you're getting more client issues because they're focused on, "We need to be at 2.17 days. So I haven't heard from this client in two hours, close that case," instead of it making sure that their service experience is the best. So like this year we're doing time since last activity and making sure that they're touching the cases and passing meaningful updates.

One of the groups, their time since last activity is so ridiculous that they were on same day closure, but that one kind of scares me. And so I also set with them expectation that they could only have a certain amount of escalations so that they didn't just close every case at the end of the day. They actually could

negatively impact the goal because they're so focused on trying to hit that number. So they're learning, but I think this year because of the way that we're going to really have some good reviews this time because one of the things that we've been discussing is we can't have subjective criteria.

The backdrop to this conversation about measurable goals stems from the level of agreement over time among management. Both Cassandra and Naomi shared experiences in which their peer group or upper-level management has not changed to more objective goals versus the current subjective goals. Naomi shared her experience of discussing setting performance goals with her peers.

We talked about how we needed SMART goals. They were smarter, but not SMART. There were still a lot of subjectivity, it wasn't clear, and we still hadn't gotten to a point where we're trying to do them all as a team. And I understand why we were doing it, but it gets difficult and so I'm trying to play well with the team but at the same time I wanted to just like . . . I'm just going to disconnect and write my own goals, and we're going to try to write one set of goals for everybody . . . not sure how that's going to go. So we're going to try it again this year. I was kind of disappointed with where we went last year. And I know it's not right to disengage from it and just go well whatever.

Over the last few years, Naomi explained, her peers have moved closer to having measurable goals, but they still have more progress to make.

Other concerns around goal setting were goals being set late in the year, not taking annual reviews seriously, and the need for upper management to communicate the use of the system down through the organization. Naomi and Peter shared their

experiences and thoughts on this topic. Naomi has found that since the management team gets goals out late in the year, many employees complain that they cannot be assessed for the entire year because they were not aware of the goals.

I think what I'm going to do this year, and because the other thing that happens with most of them is they feel like, "Well, I didn't have the full year, so it's not fair to measure me on it." So leaving it at high level they don't typically push back as much as if they had specific defined ones. We're going to start in the last month of the fiscal year [setting goals]. We're going to start defining [more] now. So even though we're not done [with finishing out the year], fortunately I'm going to be ahead of the managers. Typically we've started with goals in September, but that's already two months into the year, but it's the only way that I can do it that's it's going to make sense for all of my employees to be able to assign tasks and do it in a timely manner. And when the time comes we'll talk and I'll do like I did again this year.

Not setting goals in a timely manner can also lead to employees not taking the annual reviews seriously.

I think [setting goals early] is a good thing to do with them because I think a lot of times they don't take the reviews seriously, at least one of my teams, I know that they don't take it seriously. They feel like we take so long to push it to them that it's never a full year anyway and so they don't see it as an accurate assessment of who they are because – and I've actually gotten this feedback that, "You can't measure me on an annual review criteria that I've only been aware of for seven months."



Peter felt similarly and Naomi has an understanding about this with her employees. She agrees it is not fair that the goals were not shared until later in the fiscal year and she has to come to an agreement with them. She does this by reasoning with them and explaining how their core job has not changed drastically from the previous year.

I think it's fair. You didn't have a year to prepare for it, but a lot of times the feedback that I'll give to them is, "None of the criteria changes so drastically that you were unaware of what your basic job duties are." That's usually my feedback to them. "I agree that you didn't know the exact numbers and things like that for the entire year, but what your job is and your duties haven't changed, your position didn't change. And so if you're doing your job to the best of your abilities then you will always do them above what the review is calling you to do."

Naomi knows that the organization needs to improve in goal setting. Although it may be difficult to have these conversations with employees due to the lack of timeliness in the organization, she still perseveres and finds ways to make things easier for her team while acting as an advocate for objectivity and measurement among her peers.

Peter thinks there should be more champions from management reminding everyone about their responsibilities in the PAS and how important it is to the organization.

My experience so far this year has [been that the] vice president from managers have not even touted or championed, or reminded, team leads to keep that up with employees, but I've been doing that. Hopefully that will be coming from the

higher-ups, as I'm assuming that it would probably be envisioned by them to do it that way.

Another challenge that came to light as a result of using the new PAS is that since a number of employees have goals and bonus plans, employee often focus more on completing targets in the bonus plans as opposed to both sets of goals. In addition, many employees and managers are not spending adequate amounts of time in the PAS throughout the year, to update progress or talk about their progress. Naomi shared her feelings about this aspect of performance reviews.

I think that the things that I would have changed and we're kind of changing them now is getting them more involved, spending more time talking about it during our one-on-one specifically in the system. We talk about what those goals are but we don't look at them in the system as often as we should and I think that's something that I want to make sure I'm doing more frequently, so that it's not, "Okay we logged into PAS in June and we logged into PAS in August." I think the other thing that we don't do is because we have the bonuses and the bonuses are set to incent of goals and then we have the focal point review and that's a different set of goals. The focal point of review is never as important to them as the bonus goals. So you're looking at a couple of thousand dollars being given to you versus your 2% to 3% (and you manager is saying) that your super – they (employees) tend to focus more on, 'What do I need to do to make sure we get our bonuses?'

The manner in which goals are set for individuals, groups, and the organization sets the tone for the fiscal year. It creates alignment and provides direction. Goals that are

objective, measurable, and understood by employees support PFCs throughout the performance year. Moving to a new process or system for goal setting demands a concerted effort on the part of the company to educate employees and leaders on the new system, the benefits of the change, and the desired long-term results.

***The performance assessment system.*** The structure of the performance management system, usage of the system, comparison of the old and new PAS, and the impact of changing the PAS all impact how PFCs are tracked and conducted. The accessibility of the PAS is an important topic to cover in the performance review process. Ann, Peter, Pranav, Karen, and Naomi all shared thoughts about accessing the PAS. Generally, employees should access the PAS throughout the year, not just during annual performance reviews. However, many employees access it only during the performance review period. Peter said, “You have to experience those challenges (with the PAS) again.” Ann found it hard to find at first.

The first few times it probably took [chuckles] a little time to find it. I had to look for an email where it was referenced and kind of go that way. The more that you go in there of course, the easier it is to navigate because you’re getting more familiar. The first few times it was a little difficult. Just finding it mostly.

Pranav did not find it difficult to use the PAS and navigate the system. “It’s a lot more user-friendly than before. I think it was much smoother this time. I think the first time there were some technical issues.” Samantha thought at first that a lot of education was needed for everyone on using the new PAS.

Anything that's new just seems like, really just seems like a lot. I could see where it would be beneficial once we were using it more frequently. The more that we use it, I'm sure it'll get easier because it . . . it wasn't that hard.

Companies should be prepared to provide educational opportunities to meet the needs of employees who need a little or a lot of direction in learning to use a new PAS.

Some participants believed managers and employees were not using the PAS to its full capacity. Karen, Naomi, Really do not use the PAS to its fullest capacity.

For the most part no one is actually fully using that PAS to the degree that we really can use it to develop talent. It's talent management. I don't think I will really, really get the full extent of talent management or development, but I can do things on my own.

Karen believed that since the company was not using the system to its fullest capacity, she had to rely on herself for development. Naomi also felt the PAS was not being used it to its fullest capacity.

In general, I think that system is a good system. It has all of these tools and things that you can use to engage your employee and help them with the planning. At the end of the year you're saying I have a week to do this, just dump something in there. In the end we tend to not talk about it. We don't talk about it with our HR business partners; we just, say, "Here's your goal; here's your dates." And then in order to make those deadlines, garbage in, garbage out. I think a lot of times garbage goes in just to make those deadlines but there's not really a focus on working with developing a process that fits with the system that we have.

There might be an opportunity to leverage the system more from a goal-oriented perspective for the individual, group, and organization. Naomi and Karen believe there are greater potential benefits available from fully utilizing the PAS.

Both positives and negatives emerged when comparing the new system with the previous one. Cassandra found that her employees had a hard time grasping that they had the ability to enter information into the system throughout the year.

Having that ability to do that all throughout the year is another thing that was a little bit of a struggle for them because they were just not used to it. “You want me to . . . but what about this? How can we do that?” They’re still using the new system the same way we did with old system.

Peter describes the evaluation process in the PAS as “trying to find the puzzle pieces.” He would also like for the system or his manager to suggest training for areas in which he needs further development.

Apart from the standard classes that everybody is getting recommended and everything that comes out from corporate, I’ve not been recommended for any additional classes or anything like that. I’ve tried to put those in there for other employees [since he is a team lead] for them, if I see an area of weakness that they may have.

After the first year of using the PAS, Samantha remarked, “Well, this was our first year and I think it’s better than our last system. I just think that we have to get in there [and work with it] a little bit more.” Cassandra also believed it would take a few times before employees develop the habits that will help them more fully use the system.

I've been working with the team on trying to get them to put notes out there and attach stuff. So, when we would meet one on one, I end up saying, "So when we get to performance review time are you going to remember that?" And they say, "Oh, well, no." We still ended up with this mad dash towards the end to get all of the self-assessments in the system when they could have been doing that stuff along the way. The concept of how you do it is so much better. If we could – it would make it so much easier if we could just make sure that its stuff that's measurable.

Cassandra tried to integrate the benefits of using the PAS into her conversations with employees and to provide examples of how employees can use the PAS to their advantage.

The impact of changing performance assessment systems has been cumulative over time. Peter, Pranav, and Jasmin shared their thoughts regarding these frequent changes. Peter worries that the company will switch to another system soon, since the system and process have already changed several times.

In the past, you'll set up [goals in the PAS] and then by the end of the year we've got [a new PAS]. It feels like the last performance evaluation didn't really matter much because we're going to switch [to a new system]. Then, we're going to have to make up [new] goals and have to be 100% [complete] on them when you submit [to your manager].

Peter believes there have been positive improvements from the new PAS, but his primary response to the change is frustration. The combination of the new PAS, setting

goals from an organizational standpoint, and the timelines of those actions have caused confusion.

It's getting better in that I like the new system when you and your manager are able to set your goals, have quarterly checkpoints, and go in there and update your progress on those. But, I think it's a good constant reminder [for employees].

They can update their status, they can keep track of where they are as far as being 100% done on those. It just helps a manager throughout the year. Having it written down, not just looking at those once a year, you're reminded of them and you're looking at them throughout the year.

Pranav also identified a few challenges in the first few years of using the system. "I think there was some teething issues this year, from just purely technical perspective, IT-type issues, but nothing that was very significant." Peter would also like to know the leadership's long-term plan for the system.

Where is leadership going with this? And how are we supposed to properly evaluate employees and get good goals and standards set, if they're always lagging behind with either the technology or with the methodology that they are using to do these evaluations?

Pranav would like confirmation that the organization plans to get better at timing setting goals. He believes support from the leadership team might provide people with the momentum needed to embrace the system.

There is something that the employees are just not getting it when I tell them, "Throughout the year update your tasks (add notes and comments on progress) and then I'll go ahead and put in my comments on what you've done" . . . [I think

it is] because my team has been just so busy with everything and they probably don't have time to focus on it, I would suggest they make it mandatory, give a deadline, or reminders. It helps when people think things are mandatory.

Jasmin reported that her team is under so much pressure that there is not enough time to keep up with entering information into the PAS through the year. Peter suggested that mandatory reminders and trainings would increase overall employee understanding of the system, teach employees to leverage the system, and build a cadence of use across the organization.

That's still not happening with my team . . . yes, there are certain things you have to do, but my team has been just so bombarded right now. They have been so much under pressure. I was looking at my case volume and we used to take like 700, 800 cases. I was looking at the past two months and it's gone to 1600. It's really a jump for my team, so I don't like to pressure them. . . . let's just take it one step at a time.

The accessibility of the PAS in comparison to the previous system and the impact of the change from one PAS to another are important aspects to consider when strategizing to implement and build a support plan for PFCs in a given organization.

**Understand and safely challenge: the main event -the business model versus the people.** The interviewees' experiences and the researcher's observations will be used to discuss the business model of Greystone and its culture, which focuses on client service. These two elements are crucial factors in impacting PFCs.

***Match external client service with internal culture.*** Greystone's business model is financially driven and a significant amount of training is focused on serving clients.



Finances are viewed as the most important strategic initiative for Greystone, and this priority was apparent in various instances. One senior leader in Greystone has a mantra of achieving your financial plan first, then focusing on people. This helps to perpetuate a culture that values talent over the external client. One of the company's most senior HR leaders mentioned during a forum that sometimes our greatest organizational strength can be a detriment to our future success, referring specifically to the failure to maintain a balance between attention to financial plans, operational procedures, client services, and talent. The CFO SVP sent out a motivational message highlighting to leaders what they should be focusing on. At the top of this list was "clients before anything else" and fourth on the list was "talent." Preceding this message, the SVP asked for feedback from the senior team about the list and an HR team member suggested that talent be placed first. Henry, a director in the CFO, shared, "The culture is centered on the client being first and servicing them." The fast-paced, client-oriented work environment can be a challenge to balance at all levels of the organization.

Pleasing clients is clearly a company anchor. Cassandra, Jasmin, and Madison shared their thoughts about keeping clients happy and the atmosphere within Greystone. Cassandra stated that she enjoys working with and helping clients, and Jasmin also discussed how the team enjoys pleasing clients. Cassandra said, "I truly enjoy the client-facing piece of it, so getting involved from a client's perspective." Jasmin echoed, "I think that really helping the client, even if they have one client to make happy, they like it." Greystone makes available a number of trainings to promote client focus. Jasmin talked about how much the company invests in building a client-oriented environment.

We always instill that [client focus] at Greystone. We have the extraordinary service training that we offer. All of these positive trainings that we offer, I think that helps our employees, to kind of stay positive, and [uphold] the client focus that we have.

Greystone's revenue depends on how successfully the organization provides its clients with the services or products they have purchased. If a client is not pleased with a service or product they have paid for, it will impact the company's revenue and perhaps hurt future sales. This could, in time, have a negative impact on jobs if budget cuts and layoffs are necessary. It is therefore understandable that Greystone would ingrain service excellence into every facet of the company

Madison also discussed Greystone's focus on client service training.

Greystone is very big on training, which I've got to give you that. I mean, they'll train your ass off. Greystone is big on training. I've had tons of training, which is excellent and if anything that is going to keep you current? It's the training.

Greystone's business model and the value the company places on pleasing clients are formidable barriers to the integration of PFCs. The company has little agility, but continues to make an effort to progress.

**Recognize and Innovate: Moving ocean liners with oars.** Engagement and the need for training are two specific barriers to the integration of PFCs. Engagement is evident in Greystone; it is just a matter of the focus of that engagement. The following section will draw on interviews and observations to provide a window into Greystone's culture.

While engagement is important, there are also limitations present that create barriers, such as the exclusive focus on a team environment, problems with the overall dissemination of information, and a lack of communication between departments. Engagement of both leaders and employees was fairly high. Jasmin, Karen, and Madison shared their experiences with engagement. The challenges arise when bureaucracy gets in the way of creating more tailored communication, learning opportunities, interactions, and pathways for understanding. Jasmin said, “Our culture here at Greystone is very . . . team oriented? We like to work as a team.” Karen shared,

For the most part, my overall experience here at Greystone has been pretty favorable. I mean, you work really hard, but I think the rewards and recognition that you get is worth it. I’ve never been in a position where the work was not recognized, or overlooked.

Karen had a positive experience. She makes an effort to do a good job and feels she is rewarded for her efforts.

Madison noted,

So, we had Nathan for three years and he just changed the whole climate in this business unit. He knew everybody. He knew everybody’s name. He knew what you did. He had enough face time with the general population so that you didn’t forget who he was. So he would continually light the fire. And I think that that’s the biggest thing you miss in larger corporations. And he’s gone, and the fire is gone. No, there is like a little ember still there, but the fire that he had, that’s definitely gone.

An executive who fully embraces the organization and its people can have a significant positive impact on engagement. Naomi shared her thoughts on organizational communication and training, which go hand-in-hand with leadership engagement.

We go through a lot of communication and training and all of these things that go with it . . . it's almost mandatory for people to do it and it helps to indoctrinate them into the culture [of engagement].

Naomi noted that Greystone focused on communication by offering trainings. She believed this helped acclimate employees to progressively move Greystone's culture forward.

Madison shared,

I find that you lose that when you go from a smaller corporation. Greystone was the first large corporation that I had ever worked in. I always held service positions in smaller companies. And this was the first large corporation, and that was one of the things that I noticed immediately . . . you lose that, that sense of being part of a bigger issue.

Madison also believed that smaller companies inherently have more flexibility when it comes to communication. She believed that the larger the company, the harder it becomes to keep the messages clear as they move through the organization. She also believed Greystone should offer career pathing for employees, providing employees with direction so they have stepping stones for developing their career.

They don't and then they tell you, you're in charge of your career path, but they never give somebody a nudge as to you're my manager, you should know where my talents lie. You deal with me every day, eight to nine hours a day, however

many years. I think that managers, or recruiters for that matter, maybe not recruiters. Managers should have the ability to say, "Look at this job. It might be something you're interested in." Greystone doesn't do that. They give you the website, they tell you can go out there and apply for anything you want, but there is no direction. Now, do you think that's a lot to ask of a company?

Madison was frustrated during this portion of the discussion because she needed more assistance in her career search. Career pathing was an area Madison believed could use improvement. She thought that Greystone could be more helpful to employees who are trying to navigate the online internal website by providing progressions or paths to certain roles in the organization.

Or, what are the steps to get there? Okay, I want to go to payroll, okay, so, what are my steps to getting into payroll? Because when you go up and you look at the jobs online, they are all going two to three years in payroll. Well, I don't have two or three years in payroll. I have 11, I have 30 years of service experience. What do I do to get there? I know for a fact that there are very frustrated people in the client service department here that want to move, but don't know what's a smart move.

Madison felt that the information currently available to employees was confusing in terms of trying to delineate between various roles, the work each role actually performed, and the pay grades associated with them. She felt that this information could be shared with the employee by the manager or made clearer on the company's internal website. Madison said,

We're constantly told that, "You'll drive your career path. You drive your career path." So, I've never experienced, in Greystone, what I experienced in my previous job, where someone came to me and said, "This job is a perfect fit for you, and if you are interested, we want to groom you for this." So Greystone doesn't do that. Greystone says, "Oh, want to see you move up. We want to see you reach different goals. But you need to do that for yourself." So it's, I don't think that you get support, or an individual that's looking for support. I don't think you get support by the management team and then it's maybe because they have so many direct reports.

Communication between departments can also be improved. This is a theme across the company, as noted in engagement surveys. Madison shared a few ideas and experiences on this topic. She explains the importance of communication between departments and between corporate and divisions, as well as the impact of an engaging management team. Such factors require a lot of attention to ensure that communication is effective and information is shared accurately.

Going back to the communication thing, there is no communication between Department A and Department B. I mean, there's none. I have clients that have XYZ product and I would be lucky if I got a client's issue resolved in a week. Then I have clients that would call me with an XYZ product problem, saying, "I can't get anybody from Department A to call me back." We may operate separately, but supposedly we're one [face to the client] . . . but we aren't one voice.

It is very difficult to rally people together across an organization for the benefit of the client and their experience. Madison shared her thoughts on how and why messages get diluted at Greystone.

When we got a manager, then they have a manager, then they have a manager, and then they have a manager. When you are in a situation like that, the message from this manager, as it goes through the five or six managers between that manager and the manager that is above you, definitely gets watered down. It gets diluted. So you don't get the same fire that you got before, when you were getting the message directly from and I find that, having been in this business unit for so long, because I have been in this department I would say for 11 of my 12 years. She adds that because the message is diluted, it may not have the same level of intensity the original message had. This also depends on how the message was shared; for example, whether it was communicated through a forwarded email, word of mouth, one-on-one, or in a meeting.

Madison also thought about this issue in terms of which groups or teams of employees work with clients directly.

Well, I just I think the communication suffers in a larger company. You don't get the [necessary] communication. The way I look at it is that we are the tip of the arrow. We're the part that goes out there first. We are the face we have face time with the clients. We are directly impacting the client, and if anything the internal teams should be supporting client services above all else. Because we have to go out and deliver messages the client, and I do think that with larger corporations, like you don't get the same you don't get the communication that you need in

order to service the client in the best way that you can. And you have to dig for it.

I mean, that's it shouldn't be that way.

This is another level of complexity for companies to take into consideration when determining how to communicate important business information. Engagement and communication from leadership is also very important. Leaders who walk around, speaking with employees and other leaders on a regular basis, can provide a supportive atmosphere for communication. Madison said:

I can't say that the top leader that we have now, I think he's fine, I like him, I know him, and he knows me. I can't say that that he's not doing a good job, but it's not as evident as it was when you have a manager that's actually walking around. Like, Bob has never walked the floor where as Raul walked the floor all of the time. Then we had another manager a while back, Tom Roberts, I don't think he ever left his office. It's just, it's getting, it's getting people fired up, and I think that that gets diluted when you have so many different managers.

The behaviors of leaders at corporate for Greystone, as well as at the division and team levels, all have a responsibility to provide accurate and timely business information.

Madison pointed out the many complexities that exist when communicating within large organizations. These insights are important considerations when communicating at any level of the organization.

***Need for basic training.*** A huge enabler for Greystone in relation to PFCs is training and the overall cultural norms regarding training. There is a need for more training, coaching, and mentorship regarding PFCs and time management for managers, so that managers are not challenged by planning for and conducting PFCs. In addition,



this would guard against managers developing a mindset in which they think it is okay not to perform or to offload their basic people management responsibilities.

Some managers have faced challenges in conducting one-on-ones. Wilma and Sally, managers in the CF organization, offered explanations and ideas for why they have had challenges conducting one-on-ones. Wilma explained that she would try to schedule time to have one-on-ones, but it was always hard finding any time at all. Sally also had a hard time managing meetings with employees.

I do not have time to conduct meetings with my employees. I could find a sitter in the mornings, for my daughter, and come in early to get them done, but that would take a lot of effort. I know how important this is and I need to find the time.

Companies need to explore how they can support managers regardless of their managerial maturity (inclusive of conducting PFCs). At both the employee and manager levels, there is pressure to balance work with individual professional needs. In the feedback session with managers to explore why they did not pilot the toolkit, the universal response was that they absolutely believed in its importance and were aware of the impact of having regular meetings with their employees about performance. However, day-to-day client escalations and requests were in direct competition for their time. The managers expressed disappointment when they explained this. They were aware that there were negative consequences when these conversations did not take place consistently. They all explained in similar terms that they were merely trying to keep their heads above water with their workload. It was a classic work-life balance struggle for them.

Over the course of the data collection period, some managers appeared to balance their daily work and manage their teams (from a performance feedback perspective) well. While some maintained a good balance, however, others have been demoted or have underperformed in their roles. As a result, those underperformers have been asked to leave or have transferred to a different part of the business. Managers who are not properly developing talent on their team tend to produce frustrated and disengaged employees. I spoke with one employee who was working for an underperforming manager and requested to be moved to another team. The employee did not feel valued, and as a result the workload was not bearable.

Jackie, an CF employee, explained how she attempted to schedule a meeting with her manager several times, only to be canceled or rescheduled again and again. Over the course of several months of effort, they still had not met. While intentions were definitely good, the execution remains to be seen. There were clearly opportunities for improvement across the management population.

In addition, at one point during data collection, the CF HR team received an email from a member of the CF management team. The email was intended to provide a list of questions managers had about human resources topics. The email excerpts in Figure 23 indicate that managers referred to “getting rid of bad employees” and having human resources “manage the employee individual development plan (IDP) process” instead of managers themselves taking responsibility for this process.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. How to truly manage out bad employees versus allowing to move to another team?             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. After we have determined that an employee cannot be developed why are we allowed to continue to place them on different teams? I do understand that there are situations where there are just personality clashes but if the employee has been on multiple teams and all managers are stating the employee is a bad performer then he/she should not be allowed to</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
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<p>continue with the company.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>4. HR managers development plan process</p> <p>a. Managers are asked to manage more teams and larger teams due to larger clients. The IDP process is very time consuming.</p> <p>b. HR can have a Development Manager that meets with employees to help them develop.</p> <p>c. The presented a uniform source for all specialists in the business unit and eliminates managers that have team specific agendas, which influences the IDP feedback.</p>
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*Figure 23.* Email excerpts from CF Director: HR questions from CF managers.

The language of the email suggests that managers have a negative perception of employees who are underperforming and believe that developing employees is not part of their managerial duties.

Lastly, in light of the challenges managers face regarding balancing managerial duties, there were few managers outside of the interviewees who appeared to be successfully conducting PFCs with employees. One of these managers was Ann who expressed that she regularly engaged in PFC conversations with her employees. She appeared to find a good balance with managing the work in order to manage her team. When asked if her manager had these types of conversations with her, she said she “takes the ownership to have these conversations and anticipates her director’s questions regarding her performance, the status of clients, and team development.”

### **Summary**

Companies such as Greystone should be agile when attempting to integrate PFCs from an organizational perspective. The processes and culture are a part of the overall framework to provide sustainability. Supporting PAS learning for navigating goal setting, tracking progress, and elements of conversations between employees and managers are of the utmost importance in managing change and creating buy-in and momentum across the

organization. Accurately assessing the current and future state of the organization and its readiness for change are also important. Greystone's client service culture is deeply ingrained. This creates the potential for financial opportunities long term; however, in the short term it also creates barriers for PFCs and the development that can emerge from them. Overall, time is the most important barrier that exists and also has the broadest impact. This challenge affects both leaders and employees, who must find time to complete trainings and manage overall work commitments, and for managers specifically, allocate their time judiciously to engage in PFCs with their employees.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

An organization's performance in the marketplace is dependent upon a number of levers, systems, and processes that help to produce a product or service for customers. Behind these levers are employees and leaders who have the knowledge and talent to execute and perform for the organization's success. Hand-in hand with the employees that perform for organizational success, firms determine how closely performance management and business priorities are aligned. Performance management is a key driver for business and employees are the foundation of every organization. Niehaus & Overholt (1998) shared that:

To successfully meet the challenges created by the business drivers, executives and HR professionals will need to make a paradigm shift to working through people; to viewing organizations as living, natural organisms whose basic building blocks are people. (p. 54)

Managers help drive the strategic direction through their employees that the organization sets forth. Organizations, managers, employees have a symbiotic relationship. The dynamics, interaction, communication, performance, and understanding between managers and their employees are a key enabler of strategic success.

The role of the organization, manager skills and the performance of the employee must be in alignment for businesses to succeed. This chapter will provide the conclusions based on the findings of this action research study and explore potential implications for organizations, practitioners, and future research. Finally, the chapter ends with an epilogue that shares my reflections and key insights gained through this study.

## **Conclusions**

There are three conclusions that surfaced from the study: (1) confirmation on what it takes to facilitate PFCs well, (2) insight into the barriers managers' face conducting PFCs, and (3) AR process illustrated how change initiatives can fall flat. First, there were range of experiences with PFCs. In some cases there was success and in other instances they did not take place at all. There is a great deal of research regarding how managers should conduct successful PFCs. The literature reviewed was organized to five intervention categories and they serve as managerial anchors for effective performance dialogues, illustrating the collaboration between managers and employees in the performance management process. The anchors help create a line of sight to the themes in the literature, provide insight, and support the research findings.

- Congruency and the Performance Assessment System
- Bias Avoidance
- Bolstering Credibility
- Developmental Aspects
- Delivery & Accuracy

Table 21 illustrates a sample of the linkage between the anchors, researchers, literature, and connection to the research findings.

Table 21

*Brief overview of the managerial anchors, authors, performance management literature, and connection to research findings.*

Managerial Anchor	Authors	Key Points of Authors' Research	PFC Research Findings
Congruency and the Performance Assessment System	Wong & Snell (2003) and Whiting, Kline & Sulsky's (2008)	They studied the inclusiveness, participation at all levels, and congruency between the PAS (and whether it predicted overall system satisfaction, usefulness, and fairness of the process).	<i>It's getting better in that I like the new system when you and your manager are able to set your goals, have quarterly checkpoints, and go in there and update your progress on those. I think it's a good constant reminder [for employees]. They can update their status, they can keep track of where they are...you're looking at them throughout the year. - Pranav</i>
Bias Avoidance	Heslin & VandeWalle (2008)	Researched how managers should focus on facts and not personal judgments, stories or attitudes that they have constructed when conducting PA's.	<i>I look at their self-assessment [and] compare [it and there is] a huge gap. So that is one of the other things that I would look at first to just make sure that I was prepared for [the employee] conversations. Okay, I know I'm going to have to have a different type of conversation with them than I do with people that were pretty much honest across the board. - Cassandra</i>
Bolstering Credibility	Kinicki, Prussia, Wu & McKee-Ryan (2004)  Franke, Murphy, Nadler (2003)	Presented how managers should assess their communication style of providing feedback to employee's in order to elicit the desired behavior by facilitating a balance conversation. In addition, they explored cognitive process of perceived accuracy within individuals led them to want to respond to feedback.  Researched how credibility can be built by providing contextual feedback (performance inclusive of all work duties).	<i>I think that if you're [a manager] going to focus on a poor review...it needs to be tempered with what that person does well. So, that person doesn't leave the meeting thinking that they don't do anything well. You need to find a happy medium, but I think respect is the biggest thing...intimidation should not happen...[and] there shouldn't be threats. There should be an honest, open, two-way communication and I think that they (the manager) needs to listen to the employee. They need to listen to both sides and then weigh the circumstances. - Madison</i>
Developmental Aspects	Marsden (2007) and Rousseau (1989)  Major, Davis, Germano, Fletcher, Sanchez, Mann (2007)	Researched nurturing the psychological contract with employees to provide a sustainable avenue (through PFCs) to provide developmental opportunities for employees.  Explored incorporating collaborative behaviors on an on-going basis facilitates an enhanced participatory PA process.	<i>...it's the kind of relationship that we have... not when I'm delivering [annual] performance reviews. They already know. I'll call them once every four weeks or so. I'll tell them 'Hey, how are you doing? How is everything?' I'll catch up with them. I know when it comes time for the annual performance reviews I know everything that's going on. It becomes really easy for me to deliver it. It's just that aura that we create being that comfortable with your employees. It really helps. - Jasmin</i>
Delivery & Accuracy	Findley (2000) and Roberts (2003)  Atwater, Waldemann & Brett (2002), Church (1997), and Atwater & Yammarino (1992)	Managers should take time to prepare for PFCs to gather substantive information (observable behaviors) to discuss with employees.  Researched preparing for PFCs, managers should take into consideration how employees perceive feedback, build trust by providing accurate feedback and consider different formats of feedback.	<i>Usually when I'm preparing for the [annual review] meeting it's going through all of our meetings, checking my notes, pulling up any client recognitions and anything that's happened, any escalations, how they handled them, what the results were, and just refreshing myself looking at their case stats and all those things that we talk about throughout the year. [I want to make sure that] I'm not looking at my last two weeks of memory. - Naomi</i>

The anchors provide a lens to the existing research to better understand and explore PFCs. The existing literature reinforces and affirms the observations and interviews during the course of the study. The findings and the literature align and confirm the tactics necessary to facilitate PFCs well.

Second, given the research conducted and the alignment to literature, why is it that after 30 years PFCs are still so hard for managers to conduct? This study provides insight regarding what makes these conversations difficult. There are two perspectives that help us understand this more: (1) business model and (2) a higher commitment from leadership. The findings suggest that a company's financial goals can supersede the focus on performance feedback. There is a fine balance between delivering products and services (to remain profitable) and performance feedback. The literature points to findings about how corporate culture has significant influence on managers, employees, and customers in service oriented organizations. Hui et al., (2007), Chevy (2007), Auh et al. (2011), and Dietz (2004) agreed that positive or negative internal service climates impacts employees and the downstream effects to the external customer.

Third, in order to reach the level of inquiry and reflection action research requires, the AR team needed to move through the action research cycles three to four more times. Coughlan & Brannick (2010) stated that the path from the current to desired state is a series of multiple action research cycles. Reflecting on the organizational culture and looking at the AR process, this study is an example of how organizational change initiatives can fall flat. Burnes & Jackson (2011) stated that one of the most remarkable aspects of organizational change efforts is their low success rate. There is substantial evidence that some 70% of all change initiatives fail (2011). The AR team had leadership



support, however the AR team and I implemented practical and safe interventions. We did not move beyond that because of organizational constraints. The majority of the team members were not voluntary, one could argue that this team acted more like a committee. A committee that met frequently, but produced little in the large scheme of things. Employee appointments to project teams and committees are a characteristic of the CF Organization. The AR team did go through one cycle of AR and it was okay, it would be considered early AR, but we focused on tasks instead of what AR is meant to do. I believe that the organizational culture influenced us to a great extent and this is how we were used to operating. Hechanova, R., & Cementina-Olpoc (2013) highlighted in their study that:

...the importance of recognizing the role of culture in transformation efforts. Their study validates Schein's theory of culture and organization and at the same time builds on it by showing how. Although transformational leadership and change management are both important in building commitment to change, their influence varies depending on context. (p. 17)

I as well as the team members fell victim to this because of our work environment, workload, and the need to be productive. Our idea of productive was focusing on tasks instead of the overall process for election because it was our comfort zone. We had a jaded view of success in terms of AR and ended up falling short. AR is a powerful method when done well. We did not stay true to the AR process. Hechanova, R., & Cementina-Olpoc believed that organizations are human systems, the success of any transformation effort lies in the people who are tasked to implement changes. Their findings also suggest that leadership support...engaging employees, and communicating

change are important especially when implementing organization transformation.

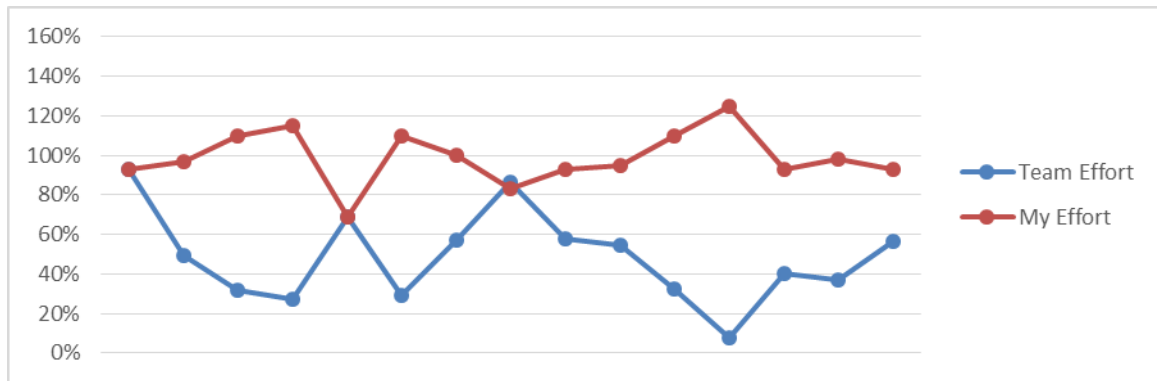
Cummings and Worley's (2005) also agree that effective change management includes the aforementioned factors as well as developing political support.

### **Implications for Research**

The major implication for research, in light of the research findings, is to continue to understand the implications of the internal business culture. Businesses are focused on the bottom line, making profit. Service-oriented work environments are hyper-sensitive to providing the highest level of engagement, problem resolution, services and products to the customers. During this study it was observed that the service oriented culture undermined performance management in many instances. Ehrhart, Schneider, Witt, and Perry (2011) found that a high level of internal service quality is needed for frontline employees to yield superior customer service. The external service in all case did not match the internal service in respect to performance feedback and cultivating developmental relationships.

### **Implications for Practice**

The most significant implications for practice is the way in which action research methodology is facilitated and understand the implications of the business culture. In light of the findings, Figure 24 depicts the workload balance overtime between the researcher and the team.



*Figure 24.* Evolution of the workload between the researcher and AR team.

There is an opportunity for future inside-researchers to ensure that the workload between themselves and the team are shared more holistically. This begins with how the team is assembled. Voluntary team members might have more of a vested interest and willingness to be a part of the team. Perhaps volunteers could have a more personal reason they connect with the mission of the team. In addition, practitioners need to learn how to lead and navigate through organizational cultures that challenge the AR process in the midst of creating change.

### **Implications for Organization**

After the initial interventions were implemented, they were well received by the organization, however they were not very impactful in the big picture. It is important continue to momentum established by continuing the interventions and finding a way to create optimal conditions to support managers facilitating PFCs and developing relationships with their employees. Perhaps more innovative and unconventional interventions could be tested with managers and employees such as, providing mandatory time for managers to conduct PFCs or build a business case with business leaders to demonstrate the negative impact of our service oriented environment to create space for a conversation about changing management behavior. In retrospect, it would have been

advantageous to tap five to six individuals that were the core of the AR team to facilitate a few more cycles of AR. This would have allowed a smaller group to become more creative and could have been really impactful. Deepa Nair & Gopal (2011) stated that creative ideas can be implemented only if there is leadership support and this is where the role of the empowering leader comes in.

The agility and flexibility of an organization such as Greystone assists in employees, processes, and services to shift to meet the external needs of the market. The structure, processes and tools to support managers and the organization for effective PFCs are critical in supporting the agility of an organization. Employees are a major component to maintaining and enabling agility to take place. The impact of Greystone's service orientation is an important influencer as it drives the internal culture and external brand of the organization. It also has a significant impact on the facilitation of PFCs. Depending on the level of managerial maturity and support available for managers, this can significantly impact how PFCs are facilitated, thus impacting the overall flexibility of the organization.

### **Epilogue**

My journey to start researching this topic started before I actually realized it was going to be my current research topic. I experienced being put on a performance improvement plan, at a past employer. This was critical to my development personally and professionally. In addition, it deeply connected and shaped my research topic of effective performance feedback conversation and the developmental relationship between managers and their employees. My academic journey and professional journey helped shape my understanding of my experience and the research I conducted.

The coursework during the master's program enabled me to have an objective view of my performance and understand my profession as an HR practitioner more deeply. *The Art of Consulting* course was especially pivotal in allowing me to learn from my experience of being put on a performance improvement plan. During this time I could not understand what was going wrong, even though I wanted to fix it desperately. In retrospect, I learned to separate my truth with the messages and direction I was receiving from my manager, my HR Manager, and the facts that I was privy to. I assumed a lot of things without having facts and initially felt blindsided when I was called into an office to have a conversation with my HR Manager and my manager about my performance. I felt I did not receive any coaching regarding the things they were describing that went wrong. I did not want anyone feeling like I had in that meeting. This led me to become more sensitive to the relationship in my interactions with managers and employees in my role at work. I started to ask questions in my profession to guide leaders and also remember to meet people where they were in their learning journey.

It was invaluable to reflect on this experience in one of my last courses in my master's program. It allowed me the time and space to understand the roles, the information shared, what was factual, and what assumptions I made. We all create our own truths and these can be based on facts or facts we make up ourselves to "fill-in the blanks" (in order to have a complete story that makes sense to us). This experience provided me insight into how, as HR practitioners, we need to meet people where they are in any situation. Everyone has capacity to learn, but people vary in what levels of capacity and pace we have to learn and adapt. As teachers, managers and HR practitioners we need to guide and meet people where they are on their journey in a

balanced way, as to not compromise or negatively impact business objectives, other people's success, or the learning process.

While focusing on finishing my master's degree I decided I wanted to earn my doctorate. When I was accepted into the program at the University of Georgia and started classes, I began to contract with my client site and determine a business need (which would also serve as my research topic). As we collaborated on this, I remembered my experience at one of my past employers. Performance management was also an important topic for the client and was a match for what evolved to be a natural research interest. My doctoral journey provided me an enhanced outside-in perspective, confidence, and allowed me to understand more fully how much I do not know. The fast paced work environment can create a sense of urgency about many things. I have found myself taking more time to make decisions and think things through with the managers I support. It was challenging being a researcher inside a company because you vacillate between having an outside-in perspective and 'living' the culture of the organization. When you are a part of the organization it is very hard to be objective, even though I made a concerted effort to do so. In reflection, I tried to handle this through having self-awareness and creating structures to support me (i.e. reflecting with friends and journaling), but still was not enough. My support mechanisms needed to be stronger. Overall, this process has continued to fuel my passion for performance management and by no means has made me cynical.

I have come to believe that the employee, job, and organization have to be congruent to have optimal productivity. We also have to keep in mind that companies, like employees, have personalities. They do have to match, complement one another, and

have enough tolerable differences, like in a relationship. Companies and employee are going to get along, understand, or work together all of the time. Some employees realize this and others do not. The relationship between managers and employees and their PFCs are building blocks for an organizations success. In the absence of this solid “base,” organizations will have more challenges being successful in their markets. This journey has provided me with the best training ground to become a better person and HR professional.

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## *Appendix A*

### **Online Consent Form**

*I agree to take part in a research study titled “Effective Performance Feedback Dialogues between Managers and Employees,” which is being conducted by Aisha Wright (Department: Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, University of Georgia, 308 River’s Crossing, 850 College Station Road, Athens GA 30602, Phone: 443-867-7227) under the direction of Dr. Wendy Ruona (Department: Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, University of Georgia, 308 River’s Crossing, 850 College Station Road, Athens GA 30602, Phone: 706-542-4415). I agree to allow Aisha to interview me in order to tell the story about my experiences regarding performance feedback conversations. The researchers will be exploring not only my experience, but the experiences of other managers and their employees. As the researcher is studying managers and their employees, I am only eligible to participate in this research if my manager or my employee is also willing to participate in this research study.*

My participation in this research is voluntary and I understand that I can refuse or decide not to participate at any time without giving a reason or penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the interviews, will be shared by the researchers with others without my written permission unless required by law.

The reason for this study is to explore my experiences, perceptions, reactions, and thoughts related to feedback dialogues between managers and employees, and uncover any insights about the evolution and nature of this developmental relationship. It is a desire that our work will add to the existing research on performance management.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I may be asked to participate in 2-4 audio-recorded individual interviews over the course of the study. During these interviews the researchers will ask me questions about the most positive and negative performance feedback experiences, learning, mentoring, career advice, and informal/formal conversation about performance with your manager/employee. The researchers will keep

my contact information for up to 5 years so that they may recruit me for future research studies.

I understand that sharing my experiences regarding performance feedback conversations could possibly be challenging at times. Additionally, discussing performance management experiences could be uncomfortable or could result in conversations that are challenging for me. This discomfort will be minimized by a guarantee from Aisha of confidentiality and a safe environment. In addition, I may stop participating at any time and do not have to answer any questions I do not want to. If the researcher uses any direct quotes from my interviews, the researchers will delete or alter any information that could identify the quotation as mine or be affiliated with my place of work. The researcher will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of all managers and employees. However, as my information will be linked with my manager's/employee's information in a published format, it is possible that my manager/employee may be able to identify information as my own.

In exchange for participation in this study, Aisha will provide an aggregate summary of the interviews to me. There are two major ways this project will benefit me: (1) by fostering deeper reflection about my role in performance feedback conversations, I will enhance my skills as a professional, and (2) as a result of contributing to the existing research on performance management, I may have a sense of satisfaction and positive impact for my organization and beyond.

I agree for my interview(s) to be audio-recorded. Recordings will be transcribed by a selected third party vendor, and the tapes/files destroyed at the completion of the study, which will be 3-6 months. Only Aisha and her doctoral supervisor, Dr. Wendy Ruona, will have access to the tapes/files. A code number will identify each piece of data resulting from the interviews.

If I have questions about this project, I understand that I can contact Aisha or her advisor, Dr. Wendy Ruona, now or at any time during the course of the project (Aisha Wright at 443-867-7227 or anwright@uga.edu or Dr. Ruona at 706 542-4474 or wruona@uga.edu).

Please mark the appropriate box below to indicate whether or not you agree to participate in the above-described research project.

\_\_\_\_\_ By marking this box, I am agreeing to participate in the above-describe research study. Please print a copy of this form for your files.

\_\_\_\_By marking this box or closing the web browser, I am indicating that I do not want to participate in the above-described research study.

## *Appendix B*

### **Performance Feedback Conversations Interview Protocol**

#### **Opening:**

- <Interviewee Name>, thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed.
- I am Aisha Wright,
- Just as a reminder, this study is to explore your experiences, perceptions, reactions, etc.. related to feedback dialogues between managers and associates, and uncover any insights about the evolution and nature of this developmental relationship. It is a desire that our work will add to the existing research on performance management.
- In addition, your name and the name of the company (or function) will not be used within documents related to the research. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. In order to accurately account what you share and so we can engage in more of a conversation, I will be recording the interview.
- What questions do you have before we begin?

#### **Interview Questions:**

- **Background Information:**
  - What is your full name?
  - How long have you worked for the company(tenure)?
  - What is your job title?
  - What ethnicity do you identify with?
  - What is your gender?
  - What is the highest level of education you've achieved?
  - How long have you been working?
  - What are the primary functions of your job?
  - What do you enjoy about your role?
  - What don't you enjoy about your role?
- **Core Interview Questions:**
  - Interview I: Most Positive and Negative Performance Feedback Conversation
    - Tell me about your most positive experience in performance feedback conversations with your manager/employee?
    - Tell me about your most negative experience in performance feedback conversations with your manager/employee?
    - Performance:
      - How did these conversations with your manager improve your performance?
      - During the conversations with your manager what hindered your performance?



**Follow-up Questions:**

- How did you feel about the situation?
- How did that make you feel?
- How long did it take for you to reflect on/digest that information?
- How would your manager/employee describe you?
- How would you describe your manager/employee?
- What are your manager's strengths/ areas of opportunity?
- What are your strengths/ areas of opportunity?
- What did you think when they said that?
- How would you improve/change these conversations?

- **Learning:**

- During these conversations how did your manager support your learning?
- During these conversations how did your manager hinder your learning?

- **Career:**

- During these conversations how did your manager support your current career or future career aspirations?
- During these conversations how did your manager not support your current career or future career aspirations?

- **Mentoring:**

- How does your manager mentor you in your role?

- **Interview II: Annual Performance Review**

- When did you have your performance feedback conversation this year?
- Tell me about your performance assessment conversation this year?
- What did you do to do prior to the conversations (to prepare)?
- What did you do after the performance feedback conversation with your manager/employee?
- Reflecting on it now, what would you have done differently, if anything?

- **Interview III: Informal/Formal PFC's**

- When was your last informal or formal performance feedback conversation with your manager/employee?
- What took place during that conversation?

*Note: any additional interviews will repeat the same question as above.*

**Close:**

- What additional information would you like to share with me on the topic we discussed?
- What questions do you have regarding what we've discussed today?
- Thank you for your time and I will schedule us for our next interview in the next 30 days. I look forward to our next discussion.

*Appendix C***CF HR Survey Administered for AR Team****Tenure in** **1. How many years have you worked**

- ☐ Less than a year (0-1 year)
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

**2. How many years have you worked in**

- ☐ Less than a year (0-1 year)
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

## Knowledge of   Roles

**3. Please think about the all of the positions in**

**and YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THESE ROLES. How well do the following statements describe your understanding using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I have a good understanding of the job <span style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 0 10px;"> </span>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have a good understanding of the job <span style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 0 10px;"> </span>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have a good understanding of the job <span style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 0 10px;"> </span>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have a good understanding of the job <span style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 0 10px;"> </span>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have a good understanding of the job <span style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 0 10px;"> </span>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Defining Your Role

**4. What is your role within our organization?**

- ☐ People Manager (Manager, Director, and above)
- ☐ Individual Contributor (Examples:

## Managerial Experience

**5. How many years of experience have you had as a manager of people?**

- ☐ Less than a year (0-1 year)
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

### Managerial Role in Performance Feedback Conversations

**6. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you held with your associate during the last performance review year and YOUR ROLE AS A MANAGER IN THESE CONVERSATIONS. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I presented the positive qualities of the performance very clearly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I presented the negative qualities of the performance very clearly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I discussed with the associate the reasons for the performance discussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We discussed ways in which the associate could improve his/her performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tone of the performance feedback conversations that have taken place were very pleasant.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was very supportive of the associate during the discussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I used the performance feedback conversation to help increase the understanding and communication between myself and the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Of the performance items that were discussed, there was an agreeable resolution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Your Communication During Performance Feedback Conversations

**7. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you have had with your manager during the last performance review year ( ) and HOW YOU COMMUNICATED IN THESE CONVERSATIONS. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I felt I had the opportunity to introduce new topics during performance feedback discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt I had the opportunity to influence performance feedback discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My manager and I shared the responsibility for the way the performance feedback discussions went.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Trust in Your Manager

**8. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you have had with your manager during the last performance review year ( ) and LEVEL OF TRUST WITH YOUR MANAGER. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust how my manager interacts with me during my performance feedback conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My manager is honest with me during performance feedback conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust that my feedback conversations with my manager are held in confidence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can honestly express my expectations of my manager's role as it relates to my job performance during performance feedback conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Level of Understanding with Your Manager

**9. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you have had with your manager during the last performance review year ( ) and your LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING WITH YOUR MANAGER. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My last performance feedback conversation increased my understanding of what my supervisor expected me to achieve on the job (your job responsibilities).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My last performance feedback conversation resulted in me having a better understanding about what my supervisor expects, in the way of future job performance improvements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Value of Past Conversations

**10. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you have had with your manager during the last performance review year ( ) and OVERALL VALUE. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My past performance feedback conversations have been valuable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Preparation for Performance Feedback Conversations

**11. To what extent does each of the following statements describe your PREPERATION for your last performance feedback conversation (i.e., the things you might have done before meeting with your supervisor). How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I devoted time to think about my job responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I devoted time to think about challenges I encountered on my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I devoted time to think about the quality of my job performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I devoted time to prepare documents or materials beforehand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Reflections on Performance Feedback Conversations

**12. Think about the informal and/or formal performance feedback discussions you have had with your manager during the last performance review year and YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE CONVERSATIONS. How well do the following statements describe your experience using a 1-5 (1= Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly Agree) scale.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I discussed what I felt my strengths and weaknesses were with my manager.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I told my manager about challenges I am having on the job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expressed my views about what things are most important in my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I used the performance feedback discussions as an opportunity to share my ideas and feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt the performance feedback conversations helped me develop my current skill set.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My past performance feedback conversation gave me a good idea of how well I'm doing on the job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt satisfied with the level of knowledge I had about receiving and providing performance feedback.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt there was enough time to have productive discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that my manager and I listened to one another during performance feedback conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that the structure of the performance feedback conversations or meetings was satisfactory.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that my manager and I facilitated productive two-way communication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



### Self Assessment Completion

**13. Do you find value in completing self assessments?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**14. Did you complete the self assessment for your last performance appraisal?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

### Self Assessment Completion

**15. Why did you complete the self assessment?**

### Self Assessment Completion

**16. Under what circumstances would you complete a self assessment?**

### Improving Performance Feedback Conversations

**17. If you had the power to implement a practice or tool that would improve performance feedback conversations from a **MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE**, what would you do?**

### Improving Performance Feedback Conversations

**18. If you had the power to implement a practice or tool that would improve performance feedback conversations from a **MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE**, what would you do?**