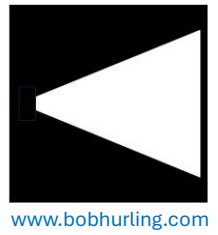


What Does Your Team Think of You?



Overview

Giving feedback to leaders isn't easy. When the feedback is negative or the culture discourages criticism, the truth often stays hidden. But what happens when feedback is anonymous? Two recent papers; one from the academic medical world and one from industry, offer compelling evidence that anonymous feedback can reveal blind spots, trigger behavioural change, and start the journey towards better leadership.

Key Findings & Insights

Anonymous feedback reveals the real impact of leaders; even when it's uncomfortable

In a study of over 300 leaders in five Business Process Outsourcing [BPO] firms in the Philippines, anonymous feedback led to measurable shifts in leadership behaviours; some positive, others defensive. Leaders improved in *empowering*, *developing others*, and *visioning*, but were less responsive in areas like *clarity*, *monitoring*, and *risk-taking*; suggesting that while anonymous feedback prompts self-reflection, it can also create discomfort and hesitation (Escaner, 2025).



Fear of retaliation & hierarchy makes anonymous channels essential in many workplaces

Both studies agree: when there's a power gap or cultural reluctance to criticise, anonymous feedback is the only realistic way to hear the truth. In US academic medical institutions, anonymous evaluations are essential for surfacing issues like mistreatment or poor teaching; especially in systems where the evaluator (often a trainee) is lower status than the person being assessed (Bhardwaj & Blackwell, 2025).

Anonymous feedback boosts honesty; but requires structure and care

The medical paper highlights that anonymous feedback encourages honesty, protects the vulnerable, and increases participation. But it also warns that, without safeguards, anonymity can lead to vague, unconstructive, or even hostile comments. The BPO paper echoes this concern: leaders may question the credibility of anonymous feedback or take it personally; so pairing anonymous feedback with coaching or counselling is essential.

Open feedback is ideal; but only in a culture of trust & professionalism

Non-anonymous feedback allows for richer, two-way conversations; but it only works if the environment is psychologically safe. In high-trust cultures, open dialogue fosters coaching, empathy, and long-term development. However, both papers emphasise that *anonymous systems may be a necessary stepping stone*; especially in hierarchical or fragile cultures where open criticism isn't yet safe or accepted.



Conclusion

Anonymous feedback isn't perfect, but it's often better than silence. It gives leaders a window into how they're really seen and creates a space where truth can start to surface. If your workplace isn't quite ready for fully open feedback, an anonymous system can be a practical and ethical first step. Just make sure it's paired with support for the recipient, because hearing the truth is only helpful if you're ready to learn from it.

Bhardwaj, A., & Blackwell, T. A. (2025). Anonymous versus open evaluative feedback in US academic medical institutions: Pros and cons. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, 16, 595–603.

Escaner, M. J. L. (2025). Comparative analysis on the impact of anonymous alternative feedback channels to leadership behavior in selected BPO companies. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(2).