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for Slack



Is Anonymous Feedback Harmful?

Hear what 500 HR execs say about
anonymous leadership feedback



Table of Contents

Introduction.....3

Why HR execs are [on the fence](#) with anonymous feedback....4

Why HR execs believe anonymous feedback is [beneficial](#).....9

Why HR execs believe anonymous feedback is [harmful](#).....14



Is anonymous feedback harmful to workplace culture?

HR professionals have been battling out this topic for many years.

One side of the fence believes that some employees may feel reluctant to share their feedback. By wearing an anonymity cloak, high-value feedback is surfaced that would otherwise be missed.

On the other side, some HR execs believe that you're avoiding the core problem - a lack of trust - by introducing anonymous feedback.

We've surveyed **500 workplace culture professionals** ranging from C-suite, founders, HR execs, and people operation specialists to share their opinion on whether "anonymous bottom-up feedback to leadership could be harmful to your workplace culture".

 **The results are in...**



6%

Anonymity could be **harmful**



46%

Are **on the fence**



48%

Anonymity will be **beneficial**



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt, is looking at a laptop screen. A man with short dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is also looking at the screen. The background is a blurred office setting. The text is overlaid on the image in white and green.

Why are **46%** of HR execs on the fence about anonymous feedback?



1 Leadership is robbed of context, follow-up, and the ability to act.



A lot of people think of anonymous feedback as a double-edged sword. While anonymity does encourage your team to speak up without fear of repercussions, it prevents leadership from being able to follow up, ask for context, or suggest solutions. It's a classic problem. **If you don't know who shared the feedback you can't get back to them.**

This is why anonymous feedback is believed to be more vague and generic. If you give too much context when sharing your feedback you risk revealing your identity. Which would remove the value of anonymity entirely.

A lot of HR execs feel anonymity robs them blind when they don't have access to these specific details. They lose the ability to follow up or have a conversation and often feel left in the dark with no ability to use their expertise.

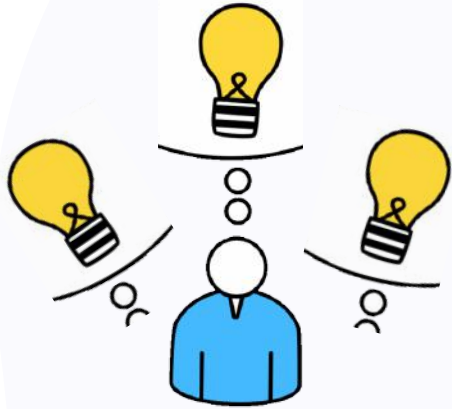


Pro tip

Don't sacrifice anonymity because you won't be able to follow up or ask for context. Find tools that help you have anonymous conversations with each feedback given.



2 Is it 1 person giving 3 feedbacks or 3 people sharing the same concern?



One person giving 3 feedbacks



3 people with the same concern

If you received 5 anonymous feedbacks on how the team dislikes policy X - how do you know if it's coming from 1 (*very vocal*) user or 5 different users?

You don't.

- What seems like widespread problems, can in reality be a lot smaller.
- Leadership second guesses the feedback they're getting (which devalues it).
- Just like inflation, anonymity has a habit of blowing feedback out of proportion and devaluing it at the same time.



Pro tip

Use an anonymous feedback tool that **gives each user an alias**. This way you'll know if "anonymous flamingo" raises the same problem 5 times in a row.



3 Creates an environment of mistrust

Chaka Booker describes his mental floor boards creaking every time someone mentioned anonymity.

He says it **leads to distrust**, where the narrative becomes to question the feedback and where it came from, **rather than take it at face value**.

“Imagine a knock at your front door. You step out to find an unsigned handwritten complaint on your doorstep. You look up and down the street, wondering which neighbor left the note. You slowly close the door, a bit frustrated and unsure. That’s how anonymous feedback feels. That’s how mistrust builds”

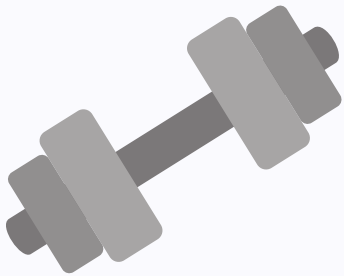


Food for thought

Chaka, would it be helpful if instead, it was an anonymous email? One that you could reply to and get more context, offer suggestions, and come to an agreement? This way it feels more like a partnership and less like an attack?



4 Losing your 'courage muscle'



It takes **courage and trust** to share constructive criticism with your leadership team. Courage is a muscle. The more you use it, the more it will grow.

Anonymity weakens this muscle. Although more feedback is shared, it is believed that it will disincentivize your team from sharing their real name in the long run.



Pro tip

Next time leadership receives anonymous feedback: Ask for more context, respond positively, suggest solutions, and enact change. This will build confidence and trust in the system.

Next time, they'll be encouraged to share with their real name.



A photograph of three business women sitting around a table in a meeting. They are all smiling and looking at each other. The woman on the right is wearing a grey blazer and a necklace. The woman in the middle is wearing a white top. The woman on the left is wearing a white top. There are papers and a yellow pencil on the table.

Why do **48%** of HR execs
believe anonymous feedback
is helpful?



1 Without anonymity, problems are usually "swept under the rug"



Anonymity, like magic, helps unlock your team's chamber of secrets and gives them the confidence to **voice sensitive, controversial feedback early** so you can make changes and improve the situation.

Without anonymity, there'll be a lot of topics that are swept under the rug and **forever remain unspoken** (*until exit interviews, if you're lucky*).



Real problems remain hidden. Why?

Because people **want to be on leadership's good side!** They want brownie points. They don't want to be the dissenter, the problem maker, the squeaky wheel.

The majority of feedback leadership receives will be surface-level, low-risk, non-threatening issues that affect the workplace.

Leaving the **most painful, ugly problems left unresolved and unspoken** 😞!



2 A diverse workforce should not have a 'one size fits all' feedback style

The best companies are built by people who come from different backgrounds, upbringings, education levels, and life experiences. [Forbes dove in deep](#) and examined the different feedback cultures across countries.



Some European countries can come across as rude, but in fact, they're being straightforward & informative.



Latin America, you have to be very cautious with the words you use and "end with a joke"



In the US, companies are open to feedback but use the "sandwich" method



In Asia "feedback is not so commonly given"

As each company takes to the rooftops to shout about how "culturally diverse" they are, is it fair to force everyone to give feedback in the same exact way? Or should we give them the option to be anonymous?

A diverse & equitable culture means supporting your team the way it suits them - not you!



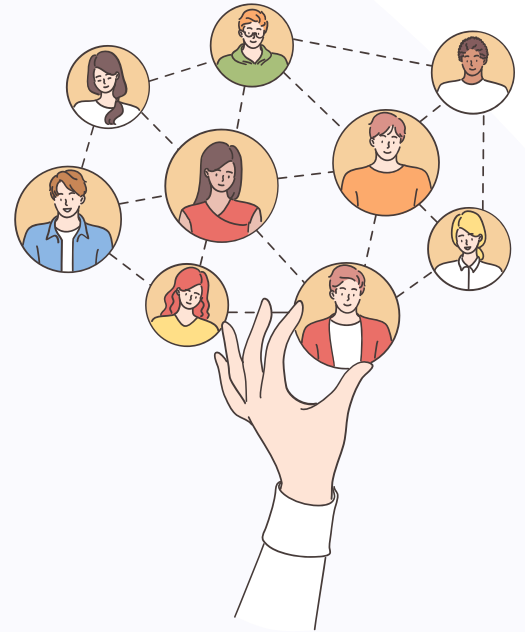
3 Anonymity builds trust (yes, you read that right!)

It's often the assumption that employees that give anonymous feedback are going to run wild, paint the town red, and exaggerate problems.

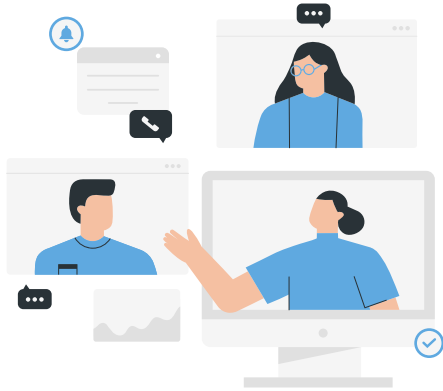
Sometimes, we forget our team is a pool of mature, responsible employees which you hired for a reason!

Giving them the ability to voice their feedback anonymously gives leadership the opportunity to show they are listening, being receptive, and care for the team!

This will naturally build trust and encourage them to share with their real name when applicable.



4 Cures "silent syndrome" during one-way leadership meetings



All hands in a post-Covid world are... different
(to put it nicely)

- 📅 Click on calendar link*
- 🔇 Hit mute*
- ☕ 'Sip coffee'
- 🗨️ Is it done yet? *
- 👤 *I have a lot of "real work" to do*
- 🔇📷 lowers volume, turns off camera*

Suddenly, the CEO asks if there are any questions, and out of 200 employees, there's this awkward silence.

Is it because no one has any questions or no one wants to speak up?

The fear of repercussions and the need to be liked prevents us from sharing our real thoughts.

By introducing anonymous questions for all-hands meetings, you can let your team ask important controversial questions that the rest of the team is also thinking about.

You gain the ability to reply to deeper concerns and guide your team towards the bright future you're working towards.



Pro tip

We recommend thinking about moderating anonymous questions that are made public, so you get the advantage of receiving what's truly on your teams' mind while ensuring all topics are appropriate



A person with dark, curly hair is sitting at a desk, their head buried in their hands in a gesture of frustration or stress. They are wearing a yellow t-shirt. The desk is cluttered with papers, a white mug, and a pen. The background shows a kitchen area with white cabinets and a window. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a dark overlay on the image.

Why do **6%** of HR execs
believe anonymous feedback
is harmful?



Why do 6% believe anonymity is harmful?

They notice the limitations of anonymity but none of the benefits.

They believe anonymity limits:

Trust

Anonymity shows a lack of trust between employees and leadership.

Courage

Anonymity gives the team an easy way out and damages courage in long run.

Reciprocation

Anonymity leaves leadership guessing where feedback comes from and limits the ability to reply.



How can anonymity overcome these limitations?

Trust

Leadership can **build trust** by responding positively to anonymous feedback.

Courage

By building trust this will give the team **more courage** to share with their real name.

Reciprocation

Some anonymous tools give your team the **ability to reciprocate** with anonymous conversations.



Anonymous Feedback: Yes or No?

You're making this decision on behalf of hundreds if not thousands of your colleagues.

It's easy to think what **you** would like, but what do you think **they** would like?

Do you think they would all prefer to voice all their feedback in the same exact way? Or will they each have their own preference?

We've read more articles than we can count and had even more conversations about anonymity in the workplace.

In the end, every article and conversation choose one side as the final decision.

That's not quite right...



What if you gave your team the freedom to choose?
Giving them the **option to be anonymous** or not.
Let your team decide what suits them best.

Would that be a crazy idea?





Upgrade your feedback culture

Build a psychologically safe feedback environment.
Directly in Slack.

[Click here to learn more about Incognito for Slack](#)

