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Florida International University study: Seeking employee feedback can drive managers to enhance fairness and improve their performance

MIAMI - (Oct. 28, 2020) – Most managers want to be fair and do the right thing, but there’s often a gap between what the manager and employee think of as “fair”.

For example: an employee may see a challenging assignment as the manager “dumping more work on me” while the manager meant it as recognition of the employee’s superior skills.

New research from Florida International University’s [College of Business](#) (FIU Business) finds that employees’ perception of “unfairness” may be influenced by managers’ limited attention - failing to notice a situation due to time pressure or extra responsibilities - as well as by limited information, or not being aware of how an employee feels.

Yet the research also shows that there’s a way to improve that perception.

“When managers seek feedback, they may become aware of fairness issues that they did not pay attention to,” said [Ravi Gajendran](#), chair of the [Department of Global Leadership and Management](#). “They may also gain information about acting justly so that their actions not only are fair but are also acknowledged as fair by employees.”

Managers looking to improve their performance and managerial skills must increase their quest for employee feedback, especially when the topic is fairness. The exchange of information gives employees a more prominent role in enhancing fairness in the workplace.

“Don’t assume that employees will come to the manager; they are hesitant to speak up,” Gajendran said. “As managers, you have to let your employees know that you’re open to receive input from them and it’s safe to discuss fairness issues.”

Researchers found that managers who regularly seek feedback from employees pay more attention to fairness concerns, learn the right way to address unfairness and can apply it to other employees, and improve their performance.

However, for this to work, “employees have to actually provide feedback,” Gajendran said. “If they don’t do it, the situation will definitely not change.”

The research, published in the [Journal of Organizational Behavior](#), examined data from three studies:

- Evaluations of 8,706 managers across a variety of industries by 40,000 employees reporting directly to them on how the managers’ actions affect other people’s performance.
- A survey of 46 employees and 45 managers on how often the manager engaged in seeking feedback to reduce same-source bias concerns.
- Surveys, completed at various intervals, by U.S. working managers about their feedback-seeking behaviors at work over the previous month.

Companies also benefit from managers’ feedback-seeking interaction. Making it part of the culture, perhaps instituting a protocol where the conversations will take place regularly, indicates they care about both managers and employees and can serve as a source of motivation.

The paper was co-authored by Gajendran with organizational behavior professors Elad Sherf, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Barry Pozner at Santa Clara University.

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About FIU Business:

Florida International University’s [College of Business](#) plays a pivotal role in the development of global business leaders. With more than 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, FIU Business is widely recognized for its expertise in international business, real estate, data analytics, entrepreneurship, healthcare management, and a broad range of financial services. Its faculty ranks among the Top 100 in the U.S. in UT Dallas’ survey of business research productivity. For more information about FIU Business, visit www.business.fiu.edu.

About FIU:

Florida International University is Miami’s public research university, focused on student success. According to U.S. News and World Report, FIU has 26 top-50 rankings in the nation among public universities and Washington Monthly Magazine ranks FIU among the top 20 public universities contributing to the public good and No. 12 for social mobility. FIU is a top U.S. research university (R1), with more than \$200 million in annual expenditures. FIU ranks 15th in the nation among public universities for patent production, which drives innovation, and is one of the institutions that helps make Florida the top state for higher education. The [Next Horizon](#) fundraising campaign is furthering FIU’s commitment to providing students Worlds Ahead opportunities. Today, FIU has two campuses and multiple centers, and supports artistic and cultural engagement through its

three museums: [Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum](#), the [Wolfsonian-FIU](#), and the [Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU](#). FIU is a member of [Conference USA](#), with more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. The university has awarded more than 330,000 degrees to many leaders in South Florida and beyond. For more information about FIU, visit www.fiu.edu.