



Pinpointing, Objectivity & Achieving Alignment

By Francisco Gomez

It is not uncommon to hear from clients that learning a few principles and tools from behavioral science can be a life-changing experience. The ability to be objective and specific when describing performance (a.k.a. pinpointing behavior) is one of the more frequently recognized game changers from this discipline. A primary reason pinpointing is so effective is because it clarifies for performers what specific behaviors to do more of, less of, or differently. Pinpointing

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is the essential first step in effectively managing the most critical behaviors driving your business.

When it comes to performance discussions, pinpointing ensures precise alignment and understanding between the person conveying the message and the one receiving it. For example, telling someone to be more customer-centric is not pinpointing. That term is fairly subjective, broad, and doesn't really specify any one behavior in particular. It is probable that the definition of being customer-centric will differ between giver and receiver. One might believe that it means making eye contact and smiling, whereas another person might think it means to identify a solution to the customer's problem. It is unclear what specific behaviors one should exhibit to meet the performance expectations.

Some potential pinpoints for being customer centric could be, *"Review the client history and their company profile prior to calling the customer"* or *"Ask the customer open-ended questions about their needs and objectives during follow-up calls."* These pinpoints provide clear and actionable direction for the performer, isolating a specific behavior that they can then receive feedback on, to gauge their progress. They leave no room for interpretation or confusion. Behavioral pinpoints also create clear and mutual accountability between the coach and the person being coached. The coach is accountable for following up on precisely the same behavior that the performer is responsible for improving.

Another benefit of pinpointing is that it leads to better *collaboration and alignment between entire work groups.* After

all, organizational functions are comprised of multiple individuals communicating with one another. The total effectiveness in how departmental functions work with one another depends on the quality and objectivity of individual interactions their respective employees have. This can be even more pronounced in the case of leadership. A single, subjective and imprecise interaction between two leaders can begin a history of misalignment and add a brick in the construction of an organizational silo.

In organizations, as in our everyday life, it's not uncommon to observe someone doing something that causes us to make subjective assumptions and judgments. We build our case on what they did and theorize on why they did it. The problem is that sometimes our assumptions have a negative bias and are often wildly inaccurate. Not surprisingly, this subjectivity affects the way



we communicate with and about that person. For example, consider a manager that is habitually 24 hours late in responding to email inquiries from a peer who works in another department. The sender has a history of flagging all of her emails with “high importance” so the manager never knows which messages are priority. The manager wronged in this scenario might build a story about how *inconsiderate* the other manager is in not responding immediately to her urgent request. Typically, these delays are just a minor annoyance, but this time the delay caused a late shipment to a key client and so she labels him as *irresponsible*, *incompetent*, and *a poor team player*. Then she ensures misalignment across departments and contributes to a silo mentality when she shares the subjective, negative labels with her own team. What started as an interpretation on the part of one single offended manager gets spread to an entire team and the finger pointing and functional misalignment ensues.

If you dial back this example, you’ll notice that there is only one fact and one behavior that is critical in this story—the offending manager responded 24 hours too late to a peer, thus preventing on-time delivery to a customer. The rest are all assumptions, labels, and storytelling. What matters is precisely and exclusively what he did and the impact that it had on the other team, the client, and the business. No generalities or labels are required. By no means am I suggesting that the delay be ignored. On the contrary, the primary utility of pinpointing is so you can give feedback to generate behavior change (remember, performance management is all

about getting performers to do something more often, less often, or differently). But it has to be objective and stick to the facts. Angrily telling the manager that he “*never* responds to her emails” and that he is “*a poor team player*” is imprecise, subjective and will probably further deteriorate the broken relationship between these two leaders and their respective functions. Worst of all, the manager probably won’t have clarity on what he and his team need to do differently in order to work better with the other leader and function. Maybe he can’t respond to every single email within a 24 hour window, but he can respond to the most critical ones. He just needs to learn which ones those are. There are many solutions to this simple problem, but sadly none were implemented, because the subjective language prevented a pinpointed and objective conversation on how these two managers and respective functions



can work more effectively together for the good of the company.

The key to bringing down the silos and having better cross functional communication lies in deeply imbedding a practice of **pinpointing and feedback** within your organizational culture. In addition to systems and process-level disarray, the primary ingredient for a silo is unclear and infrequent feedback between cross-functional leaders (as well as the individual contributors) of the organization. It doesn't matter if it's communication between frontline employees, leaders, day and night shift,



or one workgroup with another, what makes an organization tick are the people and the behaviors that they engage in on a daily basis. If the leaders of these groups can pinpoint behaviors and speak about them objectively, they will successfully break through any potential silos by holding each other and their direct reports accountable for collaboratively working together as one team.

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I often tell my clients that the vast majority of people wake up in the morning and go to work intending to do a good job. They don't go to work wanting to hurt feelings, make others feel disrespected, or knowingly engage in a silo mentality. They want to collaborate and bring value to the company. However, something happens between what they are intending to do and how other people perceive it. This is where pinpointed, objective feedback is essential. People need to hear precisely about the behaviors they engage in that are bringing value and the ones that are not, as well as understand the impact these **behaviors** have on others and on the business. The onus is on everybody to provide the pinpointed feedback and "stick to the facts" or, more specifically, **stick to the behaviors**.

[About the Author]

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As a bilingual senior consultant, Francisco supports clients with large-scale behavior change and has a proven record of generating measurable performance improvements across a diverse set of industries and business needs. In his free time, Francisco enjoys cooking with his wife and daughters, practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and playing jazz drums.

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