

# Receptive Leadership: Engage, Listen, Adjust, Repeat

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## Introduction

In 2012, during an exit interview a senior manager asked me two questions: “How am I doing?” and “what can I do better?” I spoke truth to power and it was a constructive discussion because that manager was a receptive leader. Not all leaders and organizations create opportunities for upward feedback and even fewer use it constructively.

### The Problem:

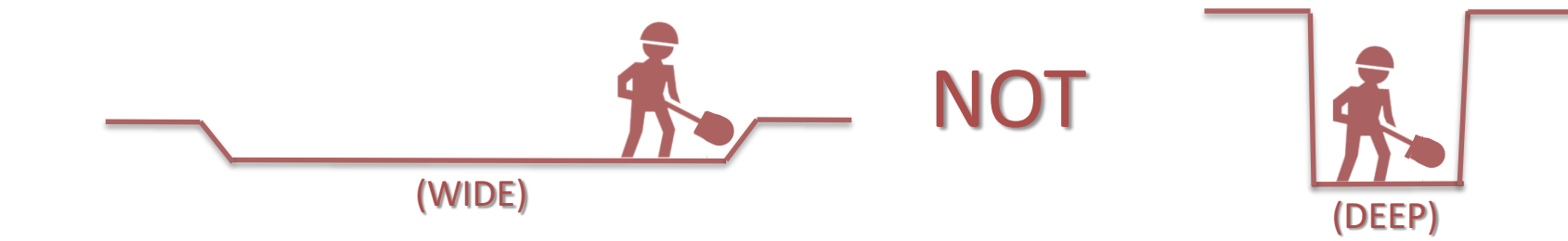
**“Long-held assumptions about corporate communication and hierarchy are breaking down.”** (Turco, 2016)

Technology has democratized communication in organizations big and small across the globe.

Organizations need to **re-think communication systems and practices**, specifically the upward flow of information and feedback through management structures.

Receptive leadership is the management practice of **proactively seeking upward feedback and using it** to affect positive change in organizations.

## Methods



I used **literature review** and **meta-analysis** to analyze and define the nature of a receptive leader. This included findings from **social science research**, general **lessons from HDO**, and **individual reflection** from past experience.

I then explored my results through creating an individual- and an organizational-model of receptive leadership.

## Literature Cited

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## Discussion and Results

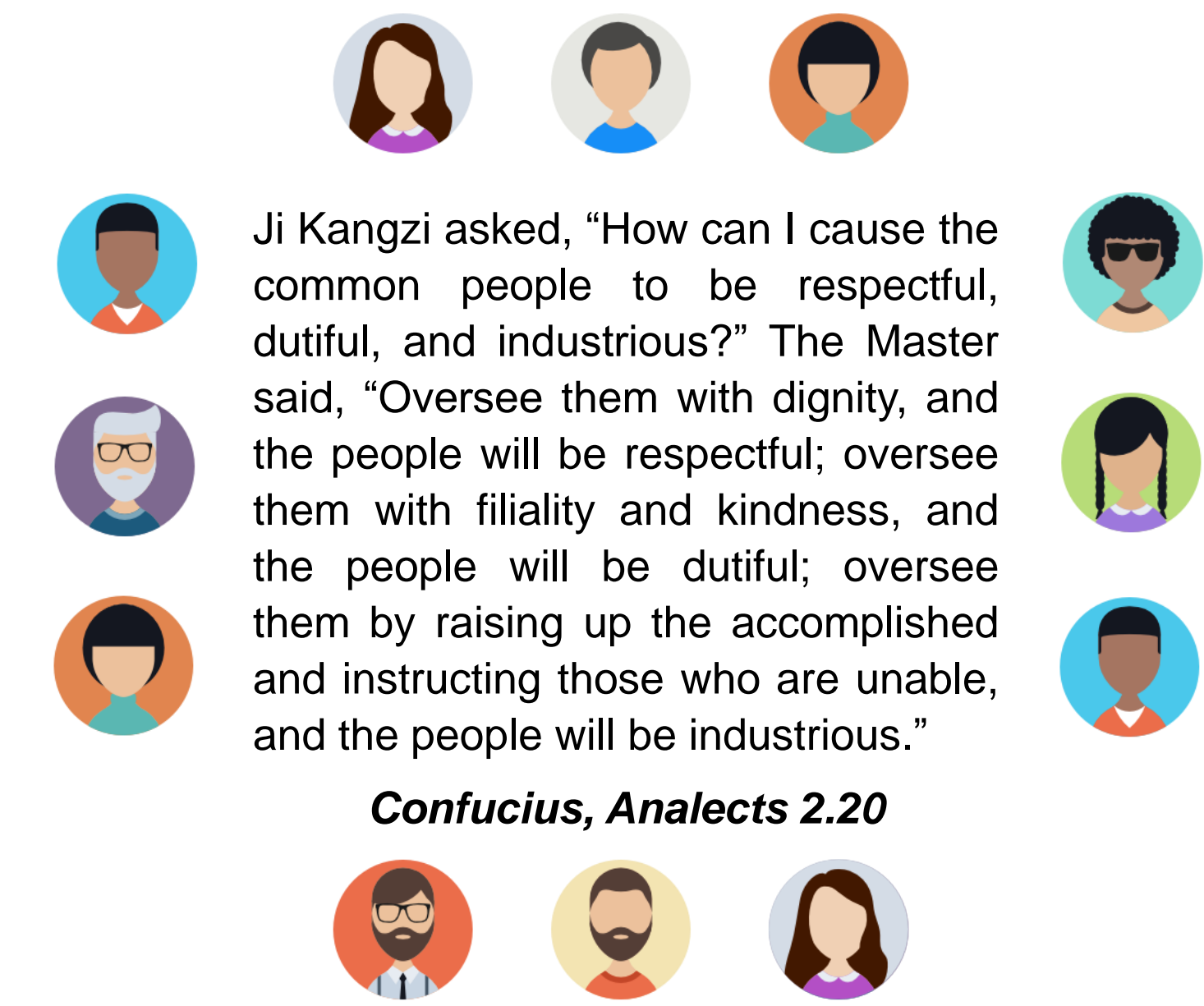
### The Landscape (Theories, Terms, and Research):

- Judgement Heuristics and Cognitive Biases.
- Organizational Frameworks – Communication in Systems.
- Upward Feedback Through the Lens of Transactional Cost Economics.
- Personality Dimensions and Maturity Requisite of Receptive Leadership.
- Parrhesia – Speaking freely or candidly.
- Social Science Research Related to Upward Feedback.
  - Expectancy Theory, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, Social Exchange Theory.
  - Connections with Downward Feedback, Safety, Transformational Leadership, and Extrarole Behavior.



### A Individual Model of Receptive Leadership:

1. Maintain a **growth mindset**
2. **Engage** the team when making decisions – avoid cognitive traps.
3. Foster **virtue and trust** – Maintain strong rapport. Facilitate healthy, constructive interactions.
4. Ask for feedback **often and** do it in a **predictable** manner.
5. **Use it**- “When was the last time you allowed a subordinate to change your mind?”
6. Make it **reciprocal** - Give honest and constructive feedback. Help them develop and grow.



### An Organizational Model of Receptive Leadership:

1. **Avoid “set-it and forget-it”** feedback programs. Introduce programs thoroughly by explaining the context in-person rather than through mass email. Cascade communications throughout implementation. Close-out by sharing findings
2. Evaluate leaders based on upward feedback - create a **closed-loop process** that ensures upward feedback improves leader performance.
3. Enable feedback forums that work - create **multiple venues** for feedback, whether they be digital or in-person, anonymous or open, in group settings or 1x1.
4. **End sessions with feedback**. Ensure actionable-items are tracked and completed. Don’t leave things ‘left unsaid’. Military term: “After Action Review.”

## Conclusions

### Tenets of Receptive Leadership:

1. **Engage** – Implement a growth mindset. Create a proactive and predictable forum for reciprocal feedback.
2. **Listen** – Empathize and actively listen. Avoid bias and never retaliate against productive critical feedback.
3. **Adjust** – Use what you’ve learned to improve yourself and the organization.
4. **Repeat** – Receptive Leadership is a marathon not a sprint, iterate and make small improvements every day.

### Future Directions:

1. Learning & Development Course:
  - a. 3 hour in-person course.
  - b. Offered 1x a quarter initially, scale if demand is high.
  - c. 1.5 hour online course through Dell’s MyLearning Portal (as an alternate to the in-person option).
2. Conduct a Longitudinal Study that could then be developed into a field guide on Receptive Leadership (and published).

## Further Information

Feedback and continued discussion is encouraged!  
Feel free to reach out anytime.

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