Feedback arises through a variety of sources: meetings, phone, email and the rare letter or report. The majority is through emails. Who is the feedback for?

You are sitting at your desk as Change Programme Manager with the usual irregular mass of messages to contend with, all of which you can readily categorise as requests for reports, requests for information, information you do not want, information you do want, and information you actually need but it is not in the form you like. Much of this is feedback. Things are happening and you are trying to keep abreast of it. You are also trying to ensure that others are aware of what is happening and, more importantly, the nature of any actual or possible problems. Which ones do you need to focus on?

Now sit back. I said you are the Change Programme Manager. This presupposes that you actually are in that role, and that your organisation recognises the importance of it. It also suggests that there are others who are responsible for managing individual units or pieces of work that relate to specific changes. Apart from the simple truth that this scenario is unlikely although some organisations already adopt this type of approach, it may all sound horribly mechanistic.

What you are looking for in the role is useful feedback from those responsible for the work that is going on in the various functions. You want to know what is working, what isn't, and why. You want to know when things are delayed compared with initial expectations. You also want to know when things are happening more successfully than expected.

We need to concentrate therefore on exception items, not the ones that are the source and cause of fire-fighting – there are bound to be some but you should be maintaining that at a low level – but on those that are good as well as bad news.

Dealing with the bad news is always necessary, about finding out what has gone wrong and putting it right. But dealing with the good news in any organisation is essential, particularly when it is undergoing change. An example:

You are reducing office space through greater availability of information on line, more sharing of services, some hot-desks. A team of people discover not only that they do not need to have a desk each – they are never all in at the same time – but that their operational costs are reduced because they can work almost anywhere else outside the office. A laptop, a mobile phone, a printer, and a homeworking arrangement has enabled them to do exactly what they intended and, more importantly, provided a degree of flexibility that enables them to carry out more inspections, more customer visits, enabling them to concentrate on more difficult cases. They are happy.

You are tempted to go into print with the news. You must. But don't write the report all yourself. The successful team should be quoted; you want them to say how well it went. As Change Programme Manager you will be perceived to have an interest in the good news. It would be better if the news came from the team themselves.

By extension so is bad news, ideally with a message showing what the team is planning to do

to achieve success. 'We've suffered a set back, and now we are going to try another way'.

The purpose of these stories is to demonstrate progress towards the objective: a better more effective group working more efficiently. The feedback is not to you as Change Programme Manager. It is feedback for everyone. Sing the successes. Record them, recognise them, reward them.

Secondly there are the great successes. Anything that you can use to demonstrate achievement can be a morale booster for the team, the sponsors, for any of the stakeholders. They all need to know that they are making progress.

Thirdly there is the routine information, some of which requires a reply: 'Thank you for the update; I'll include it in my next report'. 'I have read your message…' Well whoopee, that'll encourage them won't it?

Barry Tuckwood is the Programme Manager for Valuebill, one of the National Projects.
www.newham.gov.uk/valuebill;
barry@tuckwood.co.uk

Useful sources:
www.ogc.gov.uk