January - March 2026

AAMO
leading the way
Management & Leadership
News from the AAMO Region

Volume 11, Issue 1

PRESIDENT'SMESSAGE

Raymond Bao
President
Asian Association of Management Organisations

I am honored to welcome you to this edition of our newsletter. As the President of **AAMO for 2025-2028**, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your continued commitment and contributions to our Association. My special tribute is also paid to my predecessor, **Mr. S K Cheong**, for his exceptional leadership and dedication during his tenure.

In this first issue of the year, we explore themes that are vital to our growth and success in our ever-evolving professional landscape. The first article, **"The Living Mentor,"** from India, highlights the significant role of mentorship in developing future leaders and fostering talent in our organizations. Mentorship remains a powerful tool for personal and professional growth, and I encourage all members to embrace these relationships.

Next, we delve into **"The Digital Drift,"** also contributed from India, which examines how technological advancements are reshaping our work environments and communication. Understanding and adapting to these changes is essential as we navigate the complexities of a digital world.

Lastly, we feature an inspiring real-life story titled **"From Monologue to Dialogue: The Shift to Bidirectional Conversation"** by Brian Tang of the Macau Management Association. The story emphasizes how bidirectional communication can foster engagement, trust, and a positive work environment.

As you read through this newsletter, I hope the insights presented inspire you to reflect on your own practices and consider how meaningful conversations can improve collaboration within your organizations. Your feedback and suggestions are invaluable as we move forward together.

Wishing you a year filled with growth, success, and meaningful connections.

Happy Reading!

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THE DIGITAL DRIFT

Combating cyberloafing starts with trust, thrives on transparency, and succeeds through genuine employee engagement.

Dr Sumanta Dutta, Agnim Mitra and Siddhartha Mukherjee, St. Xavier's College (autonomous), Kolkata

In the early 2000s a digital revolution was about to change the way how people interact and engage in their social lives. As social media platforms like Friendster emerged, a company named Facebook started to gain momentum with the potential of starting a new era of social transformation. It marked the beginning of the war amongst big corporates fighting for user attention using complex algorithms and urgency cues in the digital world. This resulted in development of manipulative dark patterns embedded within the platforms that seeks to gain one's attention and increase user engagement. Its effect was far reaching and was observed in the daily lives of users with decreased productivity and an adverse effect on mental health. The impact of this phenomenon also started appearing in workplaces around the world and it quickly turned into one of the major challenges in modern human resource management: 'The problem of cyberloafing.'

Cyberloafing and its impact

The boom of technology helped ease work, but it carried along with its problems of distraction. The usage of non-work-related websites as well as surfing through the social media during working hours was the cause of the phenomenon of distraction, which is termed as cyberloafing. It includes activities like online shopping, chatting, and gaming, etc. Any voluntary act of employees using their companies' internet access during office hours to surf non-job-related websites for personal purposes and to check (including receiving and sending) personal e-mail is misuse of the internet. Such activity is commonly known as cyberloafing (Lim, 2002).

Cyberloafing was perceived to have reduced employee productivity—studies suggested that it reduced 30–40 per cent of the productivity which resulted in economic losses for organisations. (Lim,2002; Henle et al, 2009).

Gradually, cyberloafing tends to become natural human behaviour in employees who access to various social media and e-commerce channels. It has to potential to turn into an addiction. Weatherbee (2010) described that with increase in this addiction it would lead to numerous problems—deviance from goals, loss of self -control of employee, and erosion of organisational discipline. This addiction and loss due to cyberloafing can lead to disengagement. (Young ,2004). This impact of cyberloafing leads to an attention problem, as employees are unable to withdraw from cyberloafing and concentrate to finish their work on time. Cyberloafing creates a lethargy in employee which becomes a habit and erodes their discipline, promptness and active participation. But does only the pattern and emergence of lucrative from the social patterns are a reason why employees engage in cyberloafing? Well, there are various other things which have evolved this over the time. One of the major reasons found in studies said that it is done by employees to reduce their stress factor and rejuvenate them from high pressure, demanding tasks.(Lim & Chen, 2012) described that employee used short breaks as a form of recovery That allows employees to get over their stress, recharge mentally and return to work with renewed focus. Sometimes, similar and repetitive, monotonous task often led employees to go for cyber loafing in view of some relief or recreation. The boredom was countered by employees with the help of seeking online surfing. (Shiekh et al., 2015).

While some weak and unclear organisational policies with no strict monitoring and internet use guidelines become a reason for cyber loafing. (Henle et al., 2009). Also, at times work extends beyond the official hours entering into the personal time of an employee. This basically makes them push for attending personal work during office hours. (Vitak et al.,2011).

Some other reasons are that of social needs such as employees demanding social connection and derive emotional support at work to reduce stress. Sometimes these are due to perceived norms that if someone else is doing that means it’s good so even, they should do. This draws away the fear and motivates more into Cyber loafing.

HR perspectives in managing cyberloafing

Being the human resource manager at this point is quite tough, as to how they should control this issue of cyberloafing. But before that there must be identification of the different forms of cyber loafing. Researchers have identified and classified cyber loafing into four major types - social, informational, leisure and virtual. (Van Doorn, 2011; Li and Chung, 2006)

Social cyberloafing includes chatting with friends and using social media while informational cyber loafing refers to gather news and learn new skills.

Leisure cyberloafing mainly includes activity such as online shopping etc. And Virtual cyberloafing includes gaming. Understanding these and ascertained the reason the HR manager has to react. The basic things which the HR can bring about in preventing Cyber loafing is the creation of a defined and transparent internet policy. Make the employee understand the need of concentrating on their work. Some of the popular practices nowadays is the restriction of access to various websites by the company. But this doesn't restrict the employee from surfing on their own devices. Thus, motivation must be drawn to get them back. As one of the probable causes that were identified were rejuvenation from work pressure, HR can create certain fun and Stress relieving activities with indoor games in office. Employees due to extension of the work hours tend to attend personal works, here HR can monitor by not letting them slog hours. The peer effect of watching others doing can be countered by creating a holistic environment which promotes work building. Employees feel lonely, this can be mitigated through team activity, group engagement sessions and organised sessions for interactions.

They shouldn't look to punish; rather focus on making it constructive through the promotion of informational cyberloafing. Through channelling them towards professional learning platforms. Through holistic environment development and engagement, curb has to be put on cyber loafing. The internet should be used for upskilling and knowledge enhancement. Studies suggest that doing informational browsing can enhance creativity and innovative work behaviour (Derin & Gökçe, 2016).

Modern workspace demands employee motivation and inspiration. Employees in this era due to stress and other demotivational factors often drift away where they try to find a place where they get relief. The internet is one medium; with emerging patterns of lucrativeness, they often tend to drift away. Here identifying the reasons and controlling them becomes essential.

Way forward

The problem of cyberloafing is projected to increase as the technology companies find new ways to increase user engagement on their platforms. It is thus essential for corporates and human resource managers to come up with innovative solutions to curb cyberloafing practices amongst employees. The element of mutual trust is the key to any potential strategy. Moreover, the strategies must focus on creating an environment where employees feel engaged and motivated. The first step towards handling this problem is to establish a clear and transparent policy that clearly defines acceptable and unacceptable digital behaviour. The consequences of unacceptable practices must also be communicated amongst the work force. The next crucial step is to setup a monitoring system and be transparent about the level of tracking with the stakeholders. The aim is to help employees increase their productivity and not to micromanage them. Many studies suggest that cyberloafing is a symptom of deeper issues like low job satisfaction, heavy workloads, or a lack of autonomy.

Thus, focusing on output and not working hours along with practices to increase employee engagement at work is essential. Ultimately, job satisfaction is the most crucial factor in motivating employees to resist the allure of dopamine hits and dark patterns and provides a powerful internal drive that offsets the external stimulation of cyberloafing.

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Disclaimer
The article was first published in Indian Management Journal (Issue 10 Volume 64) an AIMA & amp; Spenta Multimedia publication

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THE LIVING MENTOR

When leadership is lived, not administered, institutions begin to heal and humans begin to flourish.

Rajeev Kumar Mehajan, Phd, Noblegenics Trust

Higher education institutions today are judged not only by their rankings or research output, but increasingly by how well they nurture the human potential within their gates.

In recent years, even India's premier campuses—long celebrated for academic excellence—have witnessed a troubling rise in student suicides and mental health emergencies like, repetitive anxiety, depression, self-harm, panic attacks, allucinations, severe insomnia, etc. Each such loss or mental breakdown reminds us that formal grievance mechanisms or counselling cells, though essential, cannot substitute for genuine human connection.

What institutions need now is a new kind of leadership—managerial yet humane, structured yet social. This is the premise of what we call the living chief people officer in management language, or simply the living mentor in spirit—a reimagined role that blends strategy with sensitivity and embeds wellbeing, belonging, and growth into the rhythm of campus life.

Why a new role?

Academic management has long drawn from corporate and bureaucratic hierarchies: deans, registrars, and other administrative heads, each with defined silos of authority.

The dean of student affairs, for instance, is burdened with duties that leave little time for informal engagement with stakeholders —students.Yet, contemporary campus life demands something more porous and people centred. Several converging realities make this change urgent:

Campuses as micro-societies: Students, faculty, and staff each face distinct pressures— academic, emotional, and financial. Students arrive with varied expectations, and vulnerabilities, and generally are from highly diverse cultures, ethos and backgrounds; fragmented systems often respond to crises instead of preventing them.

Expanding success metrics: Beyond placements and publications, institutions are now judged by wellbeing, retention, and student experience—across the world, even as part of the metrics in designated formal ranking systems.

Leadership vacuum: Many campuses lack visible yet approachable figures who connect organically with students. Without relational leadership, even well-crafted policies fall short.

The living mentor, being envisaged by the author, is the bridge between systems and souls— someone who converts empathy into operational practice.

When an idea meets resistance

When I first discussed this concept informally with one of my brightest PhD mentees—a sharp, fearless thinker—she smiled and called it "just another title, maybe even a work of fiction." Her reaction, though disarming, was honest. It reflected the fatigue among young scholars who see new designations as more hierarchy than help.

That response reaffirmed the deeper challenge: unless leadership feels alive, visible, and human, even the noblest frameworks risk being dismissed as another bureaucratic layer. I replied to this wonderful mentee with beautiful soul: "The Living Mentor, therefore, is not about nomenclature—it is about presence, trust, and continuity in human engagement".

Who's the living mentor?

The living mentor is not a cosmetic retitle of existing roles. Ideally, this person brings an external perspective to academia while understanding its internal culture—someone capable of influencing systems, people, and well-being outcomes.

Three attributes define this role:

1. **Presence before crisis:** The living mentor cultivates everyday engagement—sharing meals, joining walks, sitting through rehearsals—so that trust precedes intervention.
2. **Boundary spanning:** Positioned across hierarchies, he connects to students, faculty, support staff, and administrators, fostering collaboration rather than compliance.
3. **Operational accountability:** Beyond goodwill, they have the authority and resources to make things happen—budgets, metrics, and measurable outcomes.

This fusion of empathy and structure differentiates the living mentor from welfare offices or counsellors. It is leadership by being there.

The managerial logic behind it

From a management perspective, the living mentor addresses three chronic challenges cum persistent inefficiencies in institutional life ecosystem:

- **Information asymmetry:** Early signals of stress or conflict often go unnoticed when leadership is distant. Everyday presence surfaces them early.
- **Siloed responses:** Separate departments duplicate effort or deflect responsibility. A cross-functional leader aligns incentives and ensures coordinated response.
- **Reactive culture:** Most institutions respond to crises; few build preventive systems. The Living Mentor reverses that equation.
  Viewed through organisational theory — agency, coordination, and culture— the role reduces transaction costs in human systems and enhances institutional resilience.

What the role looks like in practice

The living mentor's daily rhythm is both ordinary and transformative. He might join students on a morning cycle, walk with colleagues across the campus, or share a quiet hour of yoga at dawn with a few early risers. He is rather expected to share lunch with faculty, join them at 'chai-coffee hubs', attend a play rehearsal, and end the day in a quiet chat with hostel residents as well as wardens. These are not symbolic gestures— they are the architecture of trust.

By humanising leadership through shared routines, the living mentor fosters an atmosphere where connection replaces hierarchy, and preventive care replaces damage control. A conversation during a walk often achieves more than a formal meeting in a boardroom.

I. Core responsibilities

- Routine, visible presence across campus.
- Convening a cross-functional wellbeing council.
- Designing a three-year wellbeing and retention strategy.
- Managing a small discretionary fund for immediate support.
- Reporting quarterly on engagement and wellbeing metrics.

II. Skills and profile

- Emotional intelligence and credibility across all campus groups.
- Background in leadership, counselling, and systems management.
- Ability to engage without being performative.

Measuring what matters

Empathy must coexist with evidence. Possible indicators include:

- **Engagement index:** Frequency and quality of informal interactions
- **Time-to-support:** Response time from concern to resolution
- **Retention:** Year-on-year student and staff continuation
- **Incident reduction:** Fewer serious escalations
- **Perception surveys:** Levels of trust in campus leadership Metrics like these not only validate impact but also institutionalise accountability.

Implementation pathway

Piloting allows flexibility, learning, and adaptation before formal adoption. Institutions may start small to ensure smooth and organic induction:

1. **Pilot a 12–18-month program:** Assign a leader with a clear mandate.
2. **Create a wellbeing fund:** Empower swift, human-centric responses.
3. **Institutionalise informal interactions:** Weekly open hours, monthly town halls.
4. **Cross-functional coordination:**Integrate registrars, counsellors, and student leaders.
5. **Review and scale:** Use measurable outcomes to justify continuity.

Risks and mitigation

Two main risks loom large: tokenism (a mentor in title but not in authority) and burnout (expecting one person to fix systemic issues). Mitigation includes the following CPO specific empowering strategies:

Authority and resourcing: Ensure the role has budgetary autonomy and a small, staffed team.

Distributed leadership: Build capability across faculty and staff rather hoarding onus.

Clear boundaries: Define escalation pathways— by clinical services and legal counsel.

Done well, the Living Mentor catalyses system-level change; done poorly, it can generate cynicism. Institutions must invest in this role— not as a formality, but as a cultural necessity. For its only when students see someone living fully, that they believe they can too.

Beyond academia: A broader lesson

The idea extends beyond campuses. Corporates, hospitals, and government institutions face similar challenges—burnout, disengagement, isolation. Investing in visible, human-centric leadership is no longer a soft skill; it's a strategic necessity. For universities, however, this carries moral gravity. Educational spaces are meant to build not just professionals but human beings. When leadership is lived, not administered, it transforms both.

From title to trust

Ultimately, the Living Mentor is less a position than a presence—a quiet revolution in how institutions care. Such leadership doesn't operate within the system; it becomes the culture—not a crisis responder, but a culture transformer.

In an era where intellectual achievement cannot be separated from emotional wellbeing, the Living Mentor is not a luxury but a necessity: a quiet revolution in how institutions care, connect, and create the conditions for their people to flourish.

Students trust him not because of the badge he wears but because he is one of them, yet a couple of years or decades wiser—a human compass they can turn to. He builds relationships before crises happen and transforms every casual encounter into a moment of connection.

To faculty, he is a mirror of empathy, understanding the pressures of pedagogy and research, offering quiet leadership through emotional intelligence and example.

To parents, he is reassurance incarnate—a presence that tells them, "Your child is not alone."

If academia learns to treat connection as a discipline, not an afterthought, it can turn its most intangible quality—trust—into its greatest strength. The choice is clear: either humanise leadership now, or risk losing the humanity we claim to nurture.

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Disclaimer

The article was first published in Indian Management Journal (Issue 11 Volume 64) an AIMA & Spenta Multimedia publication

FROM MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE: THE SHIFT TO BIDIRECTIONAL CONVERSATION

Brian Tang, Corporate Training Consultant

This is a real story.
A friend of mine, Ada (anonym), has just finished her first month working in a 5-stars hotel in Macau. She and her boss sat down and had a conversation about her performance. Her boss generally liked her work ethic and expertise. He also commented on her areas of improvement. Towards the end of the conversation, he asked Ada for her thoughts – how she felt about working there, what she liked and didn't like. Ada said that she was surprised by her boss's asking. She had worked for a number of 5-stars hotels in the past, Macau and abroad, but none of her previous bosses had done the same – asked her for input during a performance review meeting. Being positively surprised by her boss, Ada gladly gave her opinion about her 1-month experience. According to Ada, it was a "constructive, genuine, and pleasant conversation". Not only did they exchange valuable thoughts about Ada's work, they have deepened their relationship through the honest, bidirectional dialogue. Ada felt valued, and she was ready to continue devoting her heart to do a great job there.

That's the end of the story. Nothing groundbreaking or revolutionary – just a conversation However, as Ada pointed out, it was not common to have a 2-way conversation during a performance review. Readers may take a moment to reflect on your experience – did your boss ever give you a chance to voice your thoughts during a performance conversation? Did you feel comfortable telling the truth? Did your boss genuinely listen to what you said, or just pretended listening?
In this article, I will first examine the reasons why a bidirectional conversation is not conducted at the workplace often enough, then I will explore the "why" and "how" of conducting such conversation. Finally, I will talk about when it is NOT a good time to do a 2-way communication.

Why we are not used to converse bidirectionally in performance review? There are 3 reasons:

1. **Perception:** The purpose of a performance review (PR) is to examine the performance of the staff during a specific period, and come up with recommendations for improvement. The way we conduct it may be influenced by how we perceived it. For example, you are a manager and you are going to conduct a PR with your staff. How do you know how to conduct it? You followed how PR was conducted before you became a manager. You role-modelled it. If your previous managers never attempted a bidirectional conversation in the past, it is likely that you won't either. Can we challenge the status quo and do it in a different way? Absolutely. But in reality, very few people do that.
2. **Lack of psychological safety:** Some managers may think that they have invited the staff to voice, but either the staff had nothing to say, or the comments were superficial. Hence, the manager dismisses the invitation of comments.

   There are many reasons why a staff member has nothing to say despite the invitation to speak. According to my experience and observation, one common reason is the lack of psychological safety in the team. The staff member didn't feel safe to speak from the heart, fearing that the genuine comment may create negative impact on himself. Hence, he chooses either not to talk about it or sugarcoat it. Psychological safety is a big topic that I don't intend to talk extensively here, but the lack of it is a contributing factor why a bidirectional conversation is not considered.
3. **Fear of the unknown:** Junior managers may be reluctant to conduct 2-way conversation because they don't want to take the risk. If you invite the staff to voice, you don't really know what he is going to say. What if he says something you don't know how to respond, or he asks for something out of your control? It's like opening the Pandora's box – you are taking a risk of the unknown. Hence, it is much safer if you could keep the conversation mostly in your control by doing most of the talking.

We have talked about the "Why-not" of a two-way conversation in a performance review, I will now provide three reasons why you might want to consider doing it.

1. **Increase staff engagement:** This is human nature. It feels flattery to get invited to comment, especially in Ada's case when she was a new hire. By inviting the staff member to give her voice, it shows your recognition and you value her input. Ada told me that she felt motivated to work hard after the conversation because she "has a say" at work.
2. **Collect valuable information otherwise inaccessible:** Inviting the staff member to provide his input during a PR meeting allows the manager to collect valuable information he otherwise has no access to. In the modern workplace, the division of labor is highly structured, with each staff responsible for a tiny piece of the puzzle. The good thing about this is efficiency. The drawback is the lack of understanding on each other's situation if communication falls behind. That's why I am a big proponent of the "Management by Wandering Around" concept. Another way to close the communication gap is to genuinely ask the staff member for input in PR meetings or alike.
3. **Create a legacy:** I have mentioned that the way you conducted a bidirectional PR meeting may be shaped by how it was conducted on you as a junior member. Although you can't turn back the clock to change how it was done in the past, you may shape how it will be done in the future by changing how it is done now. Monkey see, monkey do.

The way Ada's boss conducted a 2-way conversation today may become the role model of how Ada will conduct it as a manager in the future. You are literally creating a legacy.
Now you know the benefits of the two-way conversation, let's explore how to do it effectively.

1. **Manage expectation:** Before the PR meeting, tell your staff member that you will invite him to give his comment during the conversation. This is especially important if 2-way conversation is not a norm in your team. Giving a hint in advance will allow your staff to collect their thoughts in advance, making the comments you receive more valuable.
2. **Create the appropriate environment:** Pick a place that is free from noise and distraction. Silent your phone and place it out of eyesight. The visible existence of a mobile phone, despite being silent, is a mental distraction. Put it away.
3. **Two Opens – open-mind and open-ended questions:** This is about communication skills. Ask open-ended questions to explore and dig deep. Listen attentively. One person speaks at a time. Embrace what you hear with an open mind. Don't rush to defend or respond anything at that moment. If things are not urgent, it's always to your advantage to collect your thoughts and respond after the meeting.

4. **Acknowledge and appreciate:** Regardless what you hear, always acknowledge and thank your staff member for his input. You may not agree with the input he gave, but you should always appreciate your staff member taking a risk to tell you his thoughts. Your appreciation gesture will increase the level of psychological safety in the team.
5. **End with a positive note:** Let's face it. Performance review meeting is not always beautiful. Sometimes you will have to say the hard things. Sometimes it may be your staff member who brings up a difficult topic. In any case, try to close off the meeting with a positive note. You may highlight a significant achievement that your staff member has done, or a positive direction that you both long for. The recency effect makes us remember the last part of a conversation. A positive ending can leave us feeling more hopeful and motivated rather than discouraged. We have explored extensively on the "why" and "how" of bidirectional conversation. Now I want to flip it on its head and talk about when not to use it. Almost all management and leadership practices are situational – there are situations you want to use it and others you want to avoid.

Here's situations you should NOT use a two-way conversation:

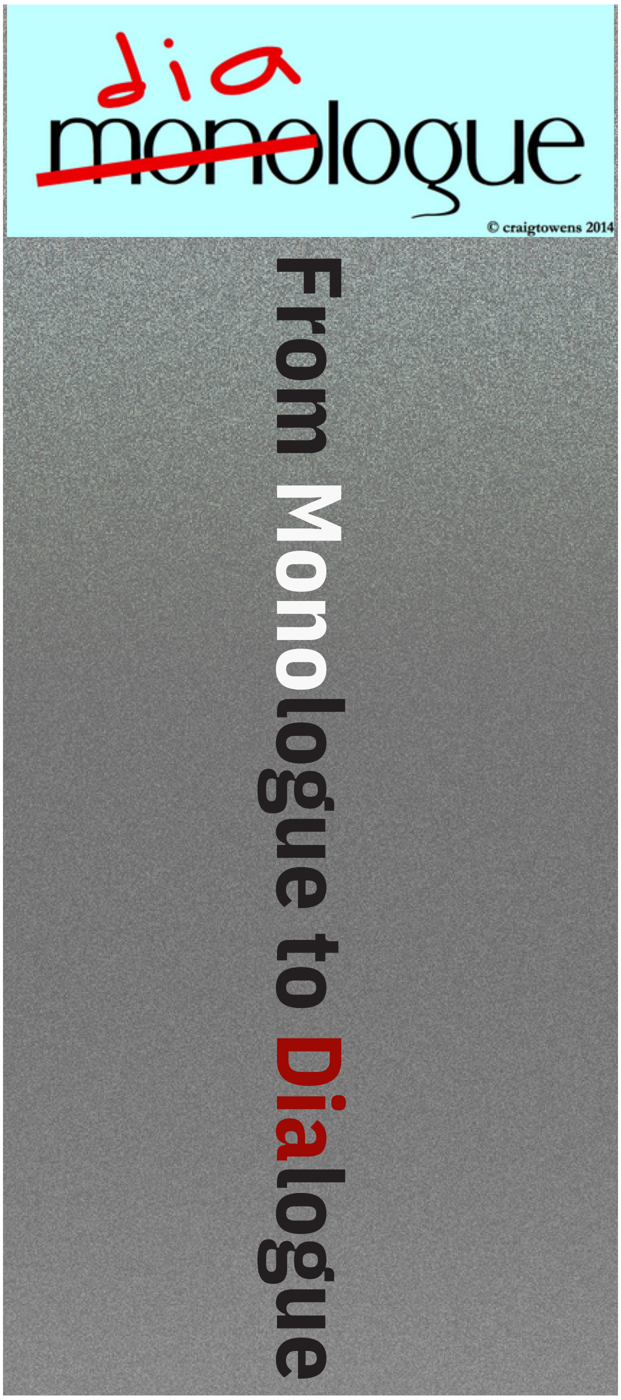
1. **Provide immediate feedback:** Imagine you found that an email that your staff member sent out contained obvious grammatical mistakes and typos.

In this case, you should provide immediate feedback to the staff – pointing out what went wrong, how the mistake might impact the team or the company, and what immediate actions and preventive measures the staff member should take. In such scenario, a dominated conversation by the manager is preferrable. Is there any value conducting a 2-way conversation – it depends. If you believe that the staff member is mature enough to self-correct in the future, you could practice a coaching conversation and let him come up with actions by himself. Otherwise, providing one-way constructive feedback is more efficient and impactful.

2. **Handle crisis situation or intense emotion:** If the situation is urgent or involves crisis, such as accidents, you may not want to take your time to dance around in a conversation. Diffusing the intense situation and preventing further harm from happening will be the priority. When the immediate crisis has been dealt with, the manager could practice bidirectional conversation with his team to dig deep for the root cause and come up with preventive measures. By the same token, if the situation involves intense emotion, such as interpersonal conflicts, the manager in charge should aim to dissolve the emotion at once. Bidirectional conversation is a rational behavior. However, human is not able to converse rationally with intense emotions. First deal with the emotions, only then should rational conversation be conducted.

Epilogue

We all know that communication is important at the workplace. One way to immediately improve communication at work is to practice bidirectional conversation. We have explored the "why not", "why", "how", and "when not" in this article. Practicing it seems like an obvious choice. However, you would be surprised how many managers do not practice it at work. At least for Ada, this is her first-time experience in a performance review meeting. Most staff members have more to say than you might think. Because of cultural practices, perceptions, or other reasons, they may rather hide their thoughts in their mind. Don't let this happen to you. You now are equipped with knowledge and skill to turn it around.



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About AAMO:
AAMO is a partnership of National Management Organisations (NMO) whose purpose is to share and actively leverage resources to enhance the achievement of their respective missions. AAMO is an independent, nonpolitical and not-for-profit Association of NMOs, which promotes, facilitates and supports the development of professional management in the Asia Pacific Region.

The current 8 members of AAMO are Australia and New Zealand, Hong Kong, India, Macao, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

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Layout & Design by:
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