Practical Application: Improving Supervisory Feedback Practices

Paola Delarosa-Lloret

Syracuse University

M.S. IDD&E Portfolio

Dr. Tiffany Koszalka

June 1, 2025

Organizational Context and Performance Challenge

In organizational life, giving feedback often creates tension, which is essential and uncomfortable. At the fictional Vertex Solutions Group, a mid-sized consultancy focused on operational support, a persistent leadership challenge emerged: newly promoted team leads and mid-level supervisors routinely excelled in technical domains but faltered in their capacity to deliver timely and constructive feedback. This shortcoming reverberated throughout the firm, affecting morale, clarity, and retention. Inconsistent feedback led to misaligned expectations, an uptick in rework, and a decline in developmental conversations. Human Capital leaders noted this feedback gap as a critical threat to sustained organizational growth and talent development.

Although these supervisors had access to training workshops and digital feedback tools, many avoided coaching conversations unless strictly necessary (Bratton, 1980; Rossett, 1996). Their hesitance signaled a deeper issue of skill, culture, and emotional readiness (Malamed, 2019; Davies, 1975). In response, I was tasked as the embedded instructional designer to develop a scalable, emotionally intelligent training program to normalize and strengthen feedback practices.

Front-End Analysis and Performance Gap Findings

A comprehensive front-end analysis employed mixed methodologies to surface the root causes of feedback avoidance. Data were gathered via structured interviews with supervisors and their managers, anonymous team climate surveys, and archival review of leadership development records (Pusch, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Rossett's five-part framework (1996)—actuals, optimal, feelings, causes, solutions—was instrumental in unpacking observable behaviors and underlying emotional friction. To complement this, a Cognitive Task Analysis (CTA) utilizing the PARI model (Prediction, Action, Result, Interpretation) helped map the real-time reasoning patterns used by expert supervisors (Jonassen, Tessmer, & Hannum, 1999).

The findings were revealing. Skilled supervisors exhibited anticipatory thinking, emotional fluency, and iterative reflection in their feedback interactions. In contrast, novice supervisors lacked a structured framework and often avoided high-stakes conversations.

Figure 1. Summary of Performance Gap Analysis

Desired Behavior	Observed Practice	Root Cause
Deliver timely, actionable feedback.	Feedback is often delayed or avoided	Emotional discomfort, fear of conflict, or missteps
Apply evaluation tools effectively.	Inconsistent usage	Low confidence; unclear expectations
Engage in coaching conversations.	Unstructured or reactive	No scaffolding, live modeling, or guided reflection

Climate survey data supported these themes: 65% of supervisors reported feeling unprepared to offer constructive feedback, and over half admitted avoiding it unless explicitly prompted. The narrative comments illuminated that an emotional reluctance, fear of conflict, or eroding rapport

dominated the hesitation. The performance issue was, therefore, not a matter of instruction alone but of emotional engagement and organizational culture.

Instructional Design Strategy and Development Approach

Designing a solution required a blend of cognitive and affective alignment. To that end, I employed Rossett's framework to anchor behavioral analysis, supplemented by CTA for cognitive clarity. Merrill's First Principles of Instruction shaped the modules around real-world problem-solving, while ADDIE served as the overarching development architecture (Merrill, 2002; Johnson & Dick, 2012). The resulting program was a blended learning experience centered on realism, emotional safety, and behavioral modeling. Key components included:

- Interactive simulations with branching feedback scenarios and embedded coaching.
- Video modeling showcases both compelling and flawed supervisory dialogues.
- Reflective journaling exercises linking personal experience with applied strategies.
- Scaffolded planning tools for preparing, delivering, and reviewing feedback sessions.

Modules were built in Articulate Rise 360, visualized through Canva assets, and supported by Excel-based planning templates. The learning progression followed a backward design model, ensuring alignment between assessments and real-world performance goals. To support dispersed learners and promote just-in-time learning, I created microlearning assets, printable job aids, mobile-friendly planning templates, and standalone feedback prompts. The program's structure allowed for phased engagement: Week 1 focused on foundational skills and simulation; Week 2 emphasized real-world application, culminating in live peer-debrief sessions to support reflection and adaptation.

Implementation, Evaluation, and Results

The pilot included 12 supervisors from across departments. Learners engaged asynchronously over two weeks, supplemented by live reflection sessions. Initial feedback underscored strong engagement, especially with simulations and video examples. Post-pilot, minor interface adjustments were made to improve clarity (Malamed, 2019).

Evaluation employed a multi-tiered approach based on Kirkpatrick's model:

- Level 1 (Reaction): High satisfaction, particularly with realism and tone.
- Level 2 (Learning): Knowledge checks and scenario navigation significantly improve.
- Level 3 (Behavior): Documented 35% increase in feedback conversations within 60 days.
- Level 4 (Results): Qualitative trust and engagement improvements noted in follow-up surveys.

Application of Instructional Design Competencies

This project provided a rich opportunity to apply advanced instructional design and performance improvement competencies:

- Conducting comprehensive performance and front-end analyses, using Rossett's (1996) framework and the PARI method (Jonassen, Tessmer, & Hannum, 1999) to uncover both behavioral and emotional root causes of performance gaps.
- Assessing learning environments and stakeholder needs through mixed-methods data collection, structured interviews, anonymous surveys, and document analysis, guided by principles outlined in Pusch's (2022a, 2022b, 2022c) instructional analysis materials.
- Designing performance-based instruction using scenario-based learning, reflection, and behavioral modeling strategies informed by Merrill's First Principles (Merrill, 2002).
- Developing accessible, modular e-learning solutions with tools such as Articulate Rise 360 and Canva and creating microlearning assets and job aids to support distributed learners (Malamed, 2019).
- Evaluating instructional impact using a multi-level framework based on Kirkpatrick's model (Johnson & Dick, 2012), integrating both formative learner feedback and summative performance data to inform continuous improvement.

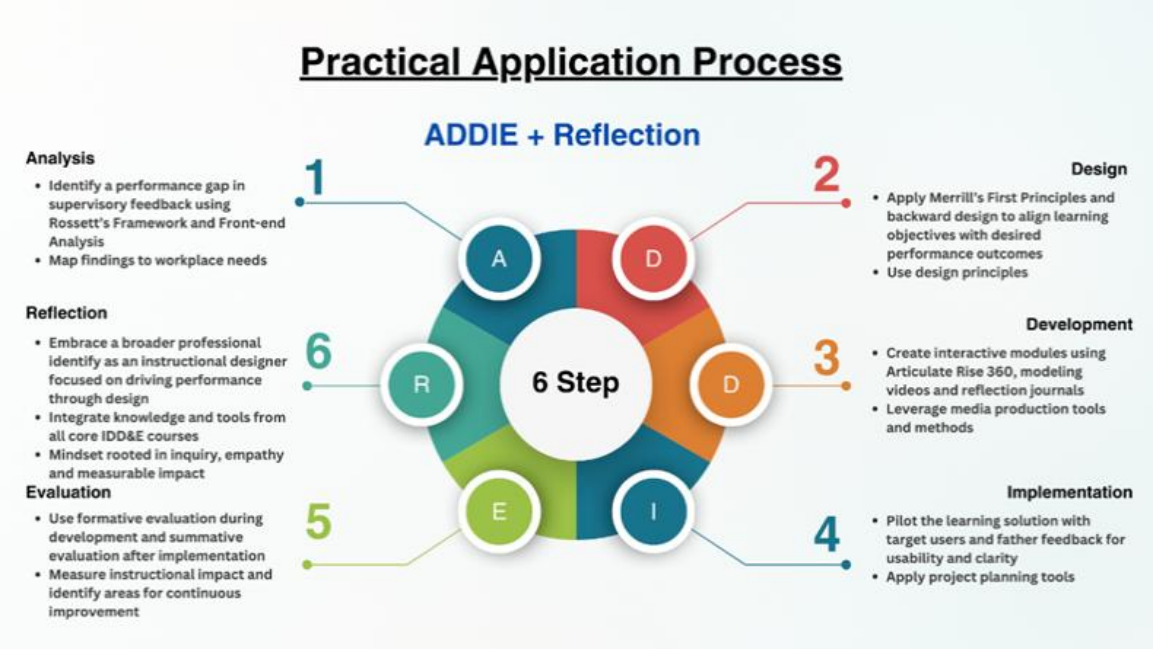
This experience reinforced the importance of aligning design decisions with data and learner context. It demonstrated how instructional design can catalyze cultural and behavioral change when grounded in empathy and evidence.

Reflections on Professional Identity and Design Mindset

This project reshaped my understanding of what it means to be an instructional designer. What began as a response to a training request quickly evolved into a systemic performance improvement initiative that addressed technical, emotional, and cultural barriers. Initially, I saw myself as a content creator. Through this experience, I had to think like a behavioral coach, systems strategist, and learning facilitator, balancing evidence-based practice with emotional intelligence to create psychologically safe learning environments.

Designing interventions that influence behavior, not just knowledge, helped me appreciate the broader impact instructional design can have on organizational culture. Empathy and intentionality guided my choices from scenario framing to tone and timing. Today, I am a strategic performance partner who collaborates with organizations to unlock growth and enable meaningful workplace transformation. This mindset, grounded in analysis, shaped by collaboration, and focused on learner experience, will guide my practice.

Figure 2. Practical Application Process Using the ADDIE Model with Reflection



Visual designed using Canva.

This visual summarizes the six-phase instructional design process to close a supervisory feedback gap at Vertex Solutions Group. It extends the traditional ADDIE model with a final Reflection phase to highlight professional identity development and showcases learner-centered, performance-driven design strategies.

References

Bratton, R. (1980). The Instructional Development Specialist as Consultant. *Journal of Instructional Development*, 3(2), 2–8.

Davies, I. (1975). Some Aspects of Theory of Advice: The Management of an Instructional Developer-Client, Evaluator-Client, Relationship. *Instructional Science*, 3(4), 351–373.

Johnson, R. B., & Dick, W. (2012). Evaluation in instructional design: A comparison of evaluation models. In R. A. Reiser & J. V. Dempsey (Eds.), *Trends and issues in instructional design and technology* (3rd ed., pp. 96–104). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Jonassen, D.H., Tessmer, M., & Hannum, W.H. (1999). Task Analysis Methods for Instructional Design (1st ed.). *Routledge*. https://doi-org.libezproxy2.syr.edu/10.4324/9781410602657

Malamed, C. (2019). Persuading Clients To Accept Your Course Design. *The eLearning Coach*. https://theelearningcoach.com/business/persuading-clients-to-accept-course-design/

Merrill, M. D. (2002). First principles of instruction. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 50(3), 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02505024

Pusch, R. S. (2022a). *IDE 712: Analysis for Human Performance Technology Decisions – Surveys as a Front-end Analysis Tool* [PowerPoint Slides]. Syracuse University.

Pusch, R. S. (2022b). *IDE 712: Analysis for Human Performance Technology Decisions – Extant Data & Document Analysis* [PowerPoint Slides]. Syracuse University.

Pusch, R. S. (2022c). *IDE 712: Analysis for Human Performance Technology Decisions – Interviews and Focus Groups* [PowerPoint Slides]. Syracuse University.

Rossett, A. (1996). Needs Assessment. In Anglin, G.J. (Ed.). (1996) *Instructional Technology: Past, Present and Future* (2nd ed.). CO: Libraries Unlimited.