

Patient Opinion

Organisational culture and public online feedback: 9 levels of development

Background

Public online feedback about health care is now an everyday occurrence. While some organisations embrace such feedback with enthusiasm, others are uncertain or even hostile.

Likewise, some organisations see online feedback as a key part of the way they relate to their users, learn about what needs to change, and even drive quality improvements. Others respond only with reluctance.

Patient Opinion has often had an implicit sense of what greater or lesser engagement with online feedback looks like, based on our experience of working with hundreds of organisations over many years. Yet we have not previously tried to make our implicit understanding explicit. That is the purpose of this document.

How might this be helpful?

Why might it be a good idea to try to set out the “levels of development” for an organisation working with online feedback? In part, this is to help us at Patient Opinion ourselves in seeing where we can improve our service to our users.

But it is also to encourage reflection and debate on the part of organisations using Patient Opinion. We hope that this will challenge organisations to do more with online public feedback, and also that organisations will in turn challenge us to improve our thinking too.

So this document is shared in a spirit of constructive debate. It should develop and change as our understanding develops.



Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Name	Resistance or defensiveness	Controlling or organisation-centric	Acceptance	Engagement	Initial commitment	Widening staff involvement as recipients	Widening staff involvement as active participants	Everyday Patient Opinion	The absence of fear
Summary	Org. culture is resistant or defensive about online patient feedback.	Tolerates public feedback but prefers feedback to be delivered privately.	Accepts public online feedback and responds. Feedback is seen as a threat to reputation, to be managed.	Org. goes beyond acceptance to a more active engagement with online feedback.	Org. sees online patient feedback as a positive force for quality improvement in some or all of its services.	Org. shares online public feedback more widely with staff, but mainly as recipients of feedback rather than responding.	Org. encourages widespread involvement by staff in being aware of, using and responding to feedback.	Awareness, use of and learning from public online feedback is embedded at every level of the organisation.	The culture of the org. has been transformed by user feedback and staff engagement.
Engagement with Patient Opinion	None.	Not registered with PO. No public indication that stories have been read.	Registered with PO. Responses often impersonal and defensive.	Encourages feedback via PO. Responses will often come from an identifiable person, and be empathic.	Org. makes a clear commitment to deeper engagement with and support for Patient Opinion, by subscribing.	Many staff are reading relevant feedback about their services.	Many staff are reading, and posting responses. Responses come from a member of staff close to the specific service.	Patient Opinion is integrated into the everyday care and culture of the organisation.	Public feedback has become core to professional practice.

Levels of development

Level 1: Resistance or defensiveness

At this level, the organisational culture is resistant or defensive in response to online patient feedback. There is a degree of fear or suspicion about online feedback, and the motivations of those who provide it may be seen as suspect. Such feedback is seen as, at worst, harmful or, at best, an irrelevant nuisance.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 1

None.

Level 2: Controlling or organisation-centric

At this level, the organisation recognises value in feedback in general. It tolerates public feedback but strongly prefers feedback to be delivered privately, via channels owned by the organisation itself. Such channels often include an online form, a private survey, a phone line, or the complaints system.

Typically, the organisation sees public feedback as potentially threatening to reputation and wishes to control its public appearance.

Feedback is often seen in an organisation-centric way, as helpful or unhelpful to the organisation. It is seen almost entirely as data, rather than as a person in relationship to the organisation.

Organisations at level 2 find it hard to think of public feedback as a wider public good, or of the experiences or wishes of the feedback donor.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 2

The organisation is aware of and reads feedback on PO. However, because the organisation is not registered with PO, there is no public indication that stories have been read.

It may import feedback into internal data systems.

No staff are responding (though there may be staff who want to).



Level 3: Acceptance

At level 3, the organisation is accepting of public online feedback.

It may see value in such feedback, and in responding to it in public. Public feedback is often still seen as a threat to reputation, to be managed by responses which deflect criticism.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 3

At level 3, the organisation is registered with Patient Opinion and able to respond.

A small number of staff in the organisation receive email alerts and respond to many or all stories. Stories are being read by registered staff and so this is recorded on the site

Responses are often impersonal and may be defensive. Responses tend to encourage use of organisation-controlled channels such as Pals or complaints systems, and discourage further online exchange.

Online feedback may be shared on social media, but only if positive.

Level 4: Engagement

At level 4, the organisation goes beyond acceptance to a more active engagement with online feedback.

At this level, the organisation is encouraging the use of public online channels, including PO, to provide feedback and for real-time issue resolution. This is typically still seen as a central function to be undertaken by just a few people in the organisation.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 4

The organisation encourages feedback via PO. It may be using PO paper materials, and have a link or PO widgets on its web site. It receives a steady stream of feedback as a result.

Responses to stories will often come from an identifiable person, and will be empathic. They will address the specific issues raised, rather than providing standardised replies.



Level 5: Initial commitment

At level 5, the organisation makes a clear commitment to deeper engagement with and support for Patient Opinion, by subscribing.

At this stage, the organisation sees online patient feedback as a positive force for quality improvement in some or all of its services.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 5

The organisation continues to encourage online feedback in a range of ways. It achieves a steady stream of feedback on Patient Opinion.

The number of staff able to receive alerts and respond to feedback slowly increases beyond a handful. Some staff add a profile picture.

Responses are often specific to the service being fed back on, but usually do not come directly from staff in that service.

The organisation may blog on Patient Opinion about service or feedback issues, or about experience of using Patient Opinion. PO may be invited to run a workshop with staff at the organisation.

Level 6: Widening staff involvement as recipients

At level 6, the organisation sees value in sharing online public feedback more widely within the organisation.

A greater number of staff become involved, but mainly as recipients of feedback rather than active participants in an online exchange.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 6

Many staff are reading relevant feedback about their services, via PO.

Most responses are posted by a small team of staff. A greater number of stories are leading directly to improvement.

Some staff are posting blogs about their service, or improvements made as a result of feedback.

PO is becoming integrated into existing feedback structures and processes within the organisation. Some parts of the organisation are promoting the use of PO actively to their users, to ensure they have local feedback.



Level 7: Widening staff involvement as active participants

At level 7, the organisation encourages widespread involvement by staff in being aware of, using and responding to public online feedback.

Staff at many levels in the organisation are able and willing to listen, improve their services, and post responses to feedback.

In addition, there is strong support for online feedback and greater organisational transparency by the organisation's leaders.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 7

At level 7, many staff are receiving email alerts, reading, and posting responses to feedback. This includes staff at many levels of the organisation, including front-line clinicians and service managers.

Typically, responses on PO now come from a member of staff close to the specific service in question. Staff feel increasingly confident in using PO. Some staff actively encourage their users and carers to give them feedback on PO.

Responses are typically specific, practical, constructive, timely and empathic. Further updates are posted where necessary following an initial response. Service improvements are frequently logged on PO.

PO blogging is used to seek user and carer views of proposed service changes, or of difficult issues which merit wider discussion.

PO is invited to deliver a staff workshop in the organisation to support detailed plans for wider use.

Level 8: Everyday Patient Opinion

At this level, awareness, use of and learning from public online feedback is embedded through every level of the organisation.

Staff and users alike are expected to provide, seek, use and respond to feedback often.

Engagement with Patient Opinion at level 8

At level 8, use of Patient Opinion is integrated into the everyday care and culture of the organisation.

PO is systematically and continuously promoted to users by staff. Training in the use of PO is a standard part of staff development.

Staff and departments regularly review and audit their performance and learning using online feedback from users. In addition, staff and departments audit their own online responsiveness.



Level 9: The absence of fear

At this level, the culture of the organisation has been transformed by the prevalence of real-time user feedback and staff engagement. All staff are engaging with public online feedback. Learning from feedback has become core to professional practice.

Likewise, users of the organisation’s services have no fear of giving honest feedback, whether online or face-to-face, because they know it will be welcomed, even if critical, and used to improve care. Staff are empowered to make necessary changes within their service, in response.

There is deep understanding across the organisation that patients and carers want to help staff provide the very best care the organisation can offer. Online, public, structured conversations are seen as an effective way to access the huge resource of patient and carer insight at scale.

Public conversations between patients and staff become the organisation’s greatest resource for driving safety and truly patient-centred care. Public online feedback plays an ever more important role in driving front-line innovation, raising staff morale, and providing independent quality assurance for the Board. The organisation’s use of and responses to online feedback are central in shaping how the organisation is seen by the public and other stakeholders across the health community.

At this level, online conversations are no longer seen as ‘feedback’ but as core to the process of sustaining and improving care.

