



TNT & A

The Explosively Empathic Team

Final Presentation

Design Thinking for Leaders

By

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Empathy Map and Key Insights

- Our empathy map was created through a collaborative review of our interview data. As a team, we compared notes to identify recurring themes, shared emotions, and meaningful patterns across participants. This helped us highlight the key similarities and differences that best represent our audience's collective perspective.
- In each category, we captured key observations and insights from our interviews, helping us clearly highlight participants' motivations, frustrations, and needs.
- We compared and discussed the data to identify overlapping ideas and recurring themes. This collaboration ensured our empathy map reflected shared experiences, and helping us refine the most re
- As a final step, we conducted one more level of refinement to ensure accuracy and reliability. We labeled each bullet point with its source, noting which interviews or participants the insight came from. This allowed us to confirm that each piece of information was supported by multiple data points, strengthening the credibility of our findings. Overall, our process was systematic yet flexible, combining analytical rigor with open discussion to create a cohesive and authentic empathy map.
- In conclusion, our group's strong collaboration allowed us to develop a well-rounded and cohesive understanding of the insights drawn from our interviews.



The Problem Statement

- Our team’s proposed problem statement is as follows: **“Employees often find it difficult to receive feedback without feeling criticized or demotivated, which can hinder their growth and performance. Meanwhile, managers struggle to deliver feedback that is clear, constructive, and encouraging, balancing honesty with empathy to maintain trust and engagement within their teams.”**
- As we revisited our empathy map and the interviews that informed it, we noticed a series of recurring themes related to how people understand, express, and respond to emotion. These patterns stood out across multiple participants, suggesting that emotion was not only central to their experiences but also shaped the way they interpreted different situations. Because of this, we felt it was important for our project to focus on emotion in a more intentional and structured way.
- During our review, we also realized that examining emotions from only one point of view—specifically, the receiver’s—would give us an incomplete picture of what was really happening in an emotional exchange. Many of the insights we collected pointed to the importance of considering the person giving or initiating the emotional action as well. By including both perspectives, we were able to develop a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the emotional dynamics our participants described.
- To help make these connections clearer, Aja’mi created a visual representation that summarizes the main points she highlighted across our empathy map. This visual helped us see how the themes from both the giver and the receiver intersect, and it provided a useful foundation for shaping our next steps. You can find her visual on the next slide.



EMPATHY MAP WITH INTERVIEW SOURCES

THINK & FEEL

- (Internal thoughts + emotions)
- Worrying about discouraging employees while still being honest — (Ajami: Tumekia)
- Feeling anxious because feedback often signals something is wrong — (Ajami: Nicky & Julie)
- Fear of job security during performance feedback — (Natasha: Ryan)
- Feeling caught off guard or unaware of the issue — (Tony: Jim)
- Wanting clear expectations, not vague opinions — (Natasha: all three)
- Wanting recognition and fairness — (Ajami: Nicky; Natasha: Andrea)
- Struggling to separate emotions from the message — (Trevor: Yesenia)

HEAR

- (What users hear from others)
- Expectations to be more engaged or prepared — (Tony: Jim; Tony: Oseyi)
- Leaders emphasizing honesty + accountability — (Natasha: Ryan; Faurest)
- Emotional reactions through tone or body language — (Tony: Lauren)
- Supportive, specific coaching — (Ajami: Julie)
- Harsh or poorly delivered criticism — (Ajami: Nicky)
- Encouragement to remove emotion and listen openly — (Trevor: Yesenia)

SEE

- (Environment + what surrounds them)
- Emotional reactions during feedback (tension, closed body language) — (Tony: Lauren)
- Managers balancing honesty with empathy — (Ajami: Tumekia)
- Lack of structured feedback systems — (Natasha: Ryan & Andrea)
- Team conflict caused by unresolved issues — (Tony: Lauren)
- Improvements when feedback includes a plan — (Tony: Oseyi)
- Clear communication improving results — (Trevor: Martha)

SAY & DO

- (What users say and how they behave)
- "I didn't realize." — (Tony: Jim)
- "Sometimes I brace myself before feedback." — (Ajami: Nicky)
- Managers preparing talk tracks or reviewing work beforehand — (Tony: Oseyi)

SEE

- Asking for clarity or examples — (Ajami: Nicky; Natasha: Andrea)
- Following up or checking progress — (Tony: Lauren)
- Trying to leave emotions out of receiving feedback — (Trevor: Yesenia)
- "Feedback isn't negative; it helps people grow." — (Trevor: Martha)
- PAIN (Frustrations & challenges)
- Feedback delivered in public or with harsh tone — (Ajami: Nicky; Julie)
- Vague or lukewarm feedback that confuses people — (Natasha: Faurest)
- Lack of early or consistent feedback systems — (Natasha: Ryan & Andrea)
- Misunderstandings escalating into larger issues — (Tony: all three)
- Feeling personally attacked instead of supported — (Trevor: Yesenia; Ajami: Nicky)
- Emotional defensiveness creating tension — (Ajami: Tumekia; Trevor: Yesenia)

SAY & DO

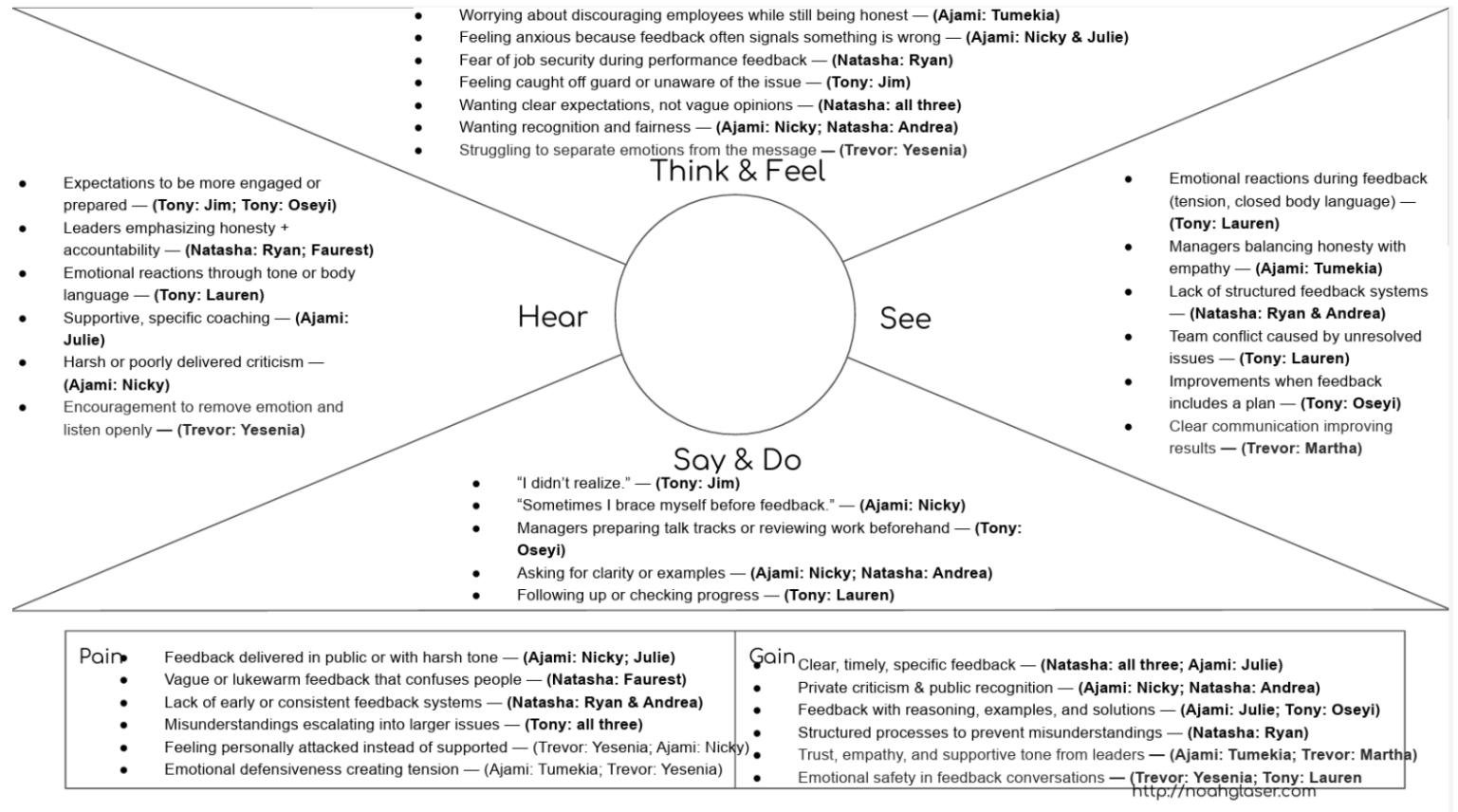
GAIN

- Clear, timely, specific feedback — (Natasha: all three; Ajami: Julie)
- Private criticism & public recognition — (Ajami: Nicky; Natasha: Andrea)
- Feedback with reasoning, examples, and solutions — (Ajami: Julie; Tony: Oseyi)
- Structured processes to prevent misunderstandings — (Natasha: Ryan)
- Trust, empathy, and supportive tone from leaders — (Ajami: Tumekia; Trevor: Martha)
- Emotional safety in feedback conversations — (Trevor: Yesenia; Tony: Lauren)
- Private criticism & public recognition — (Ajami: Nicky; Natasha: Andrea)

- Leadership

Triggers: defensiveness

Empathy Map and Key Insights



The Problem Statement We Landed On

- Final problem statement:
“Employees need a way to receive feedback that supports their growth without causing feelings of criticism or discouragement. At the same time, managers need tools and guidance to deliver feedback that is clear, constructive, and empathetic, so they can maintain trust, motivation, and strong engagement within their teams.”



Brainstorming Process and Selected Ideas

- 1. Employee-Led Reflection First
- a. Instead of the manager starting the conversation, the employee begins by answering:
 - What went well?
 - What felt challenging?
 - What do you want to improve?
- 2. Feedback Warm-Up Ritual
- Before discussing challenges, begin every feedback session with a 1-minute "strength warm-up," such as:
 - A recent win
 - A specific skill the employee has improved
 - A teammate praise from the week
 - This primes the brain for openness rather than defensiveness.
- 3. Feedback Prep Worksheet for manager + employee.
- 4. Digital Feedback Tracker app for logging goals + follow-ups (like Teams meetings)
- 5. Group Collaboration:
 - When someone makes a mistake, don't point out that person, but come together as a group to discuss multiple ways to do that task that was done incorrectly to make it feel like a group 'project' effort as opposed to feedback
- 6. Roles & Responsibilities
 - Employee: Performs assigned tasks and duties.
 - Employer: Provides work, sets expectations, and oversees operations.
- 7. Decision-Making Power
 - Employee: Limited decision-making—focused on job-specific tasks.
 - Employer: Makes strategic decisions that affect the whole business.
- 8. Accountability
 - Employee: Responsible for completing tasks correctly and on time.
 - Employer: Responsible for the overall success, environment, and direction of the organization.
- 9. Rights in the Workplace
 - Employee: Rights to fair pay, safe working conditions, and protection from discrimination.
 - Employer: Rights to expect productivity, adherence to policy, and job performance.
- 10. Use facts, not assumptions
 - Stick to observable actions instead of guessing motives.
 - Balance positive and constructive feedback
 - Acknowledge what's going well before addressing what needs work.
 - Focus on behavior, not personality
 - Talk about what they did, not who they are.

Brainstorming Process and Selected Ideas

11. Keep it two-way

Allow the employee to share context, perspectives, and ideas.

12. Stay calm and respectful

Tone matters as much as content. Deliver feedback with empathy and composure.

13. Follow up

Check in after giving feedback to track progress and show continued support.

14. Choose the right setting

15. Deliver sensitive or corrective feedback privately; praise can be public.

16. Reverse Review

Employees Review the Feedback Process. Employees give structured feedback about how feedback was given to them providing tone, clarity, privacy, usefulness. The goal is to improve how managers deliver feedback.

17. Two-Way “Feedback Preferences Profile”

Employees fill out a short profile that outlines how they prefer to receive feedback:

Direct vs. soft delivery

Written vs. verbal

Public vs. private

Frequency and timing

Whether they prefer suggestions or step-by-step guidance

18. “Feedforward Fridays” Program

Replace traditional feedback with feedforward—forward-looking guidance rather than backward-looking criticism.

Each Friday, teams exchange:

One strength they noticed in a colleague

One suggestion for future improvement framed as an opportunity

19. Real-Time Micro-Feedback Signals

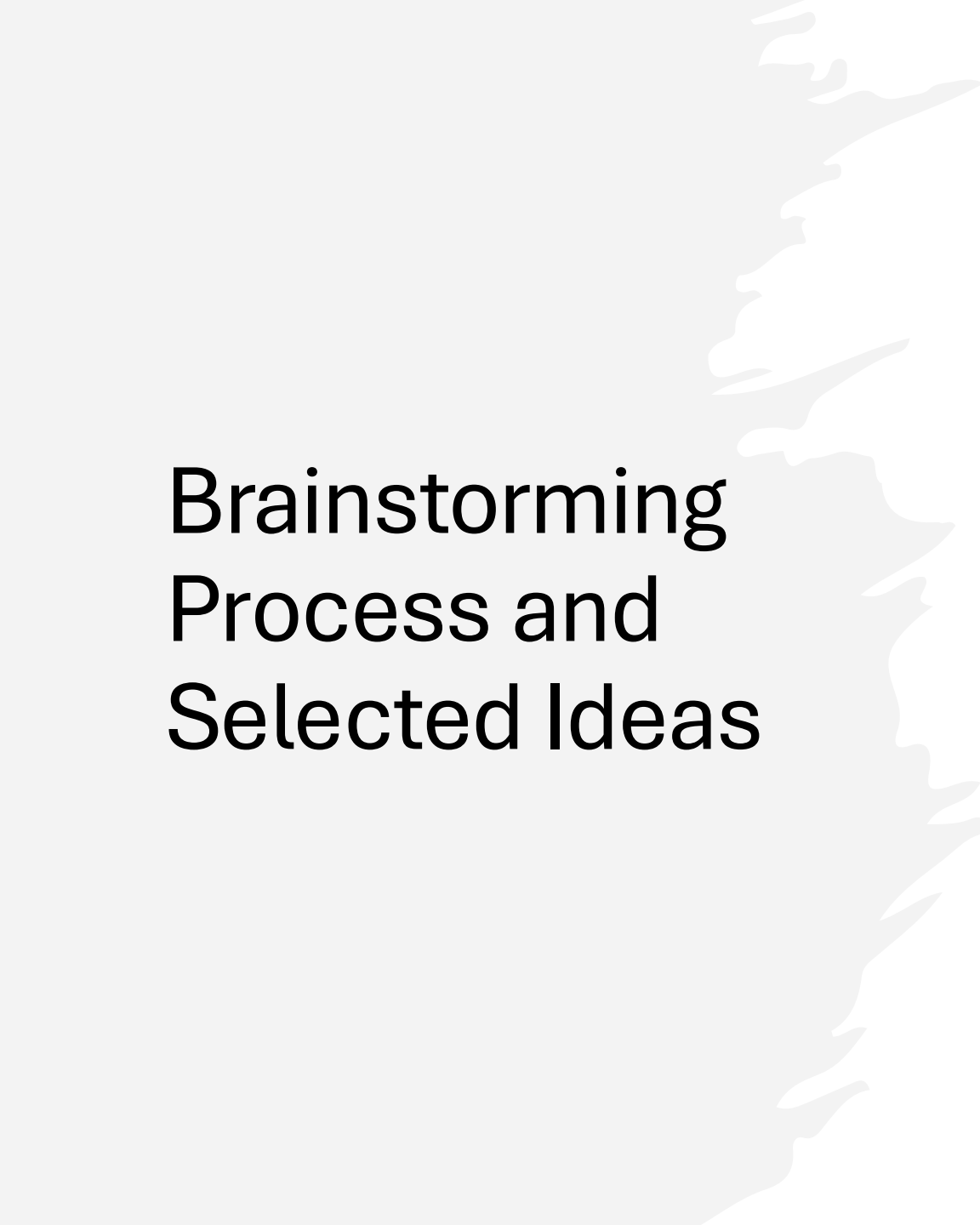
A lightweight internal tool that allows managers to give micro-feedback cues in real time using short, positive nudges:

“Loved that approach—keep doing that!”

“Opportunity cue: maybe try X next time.”

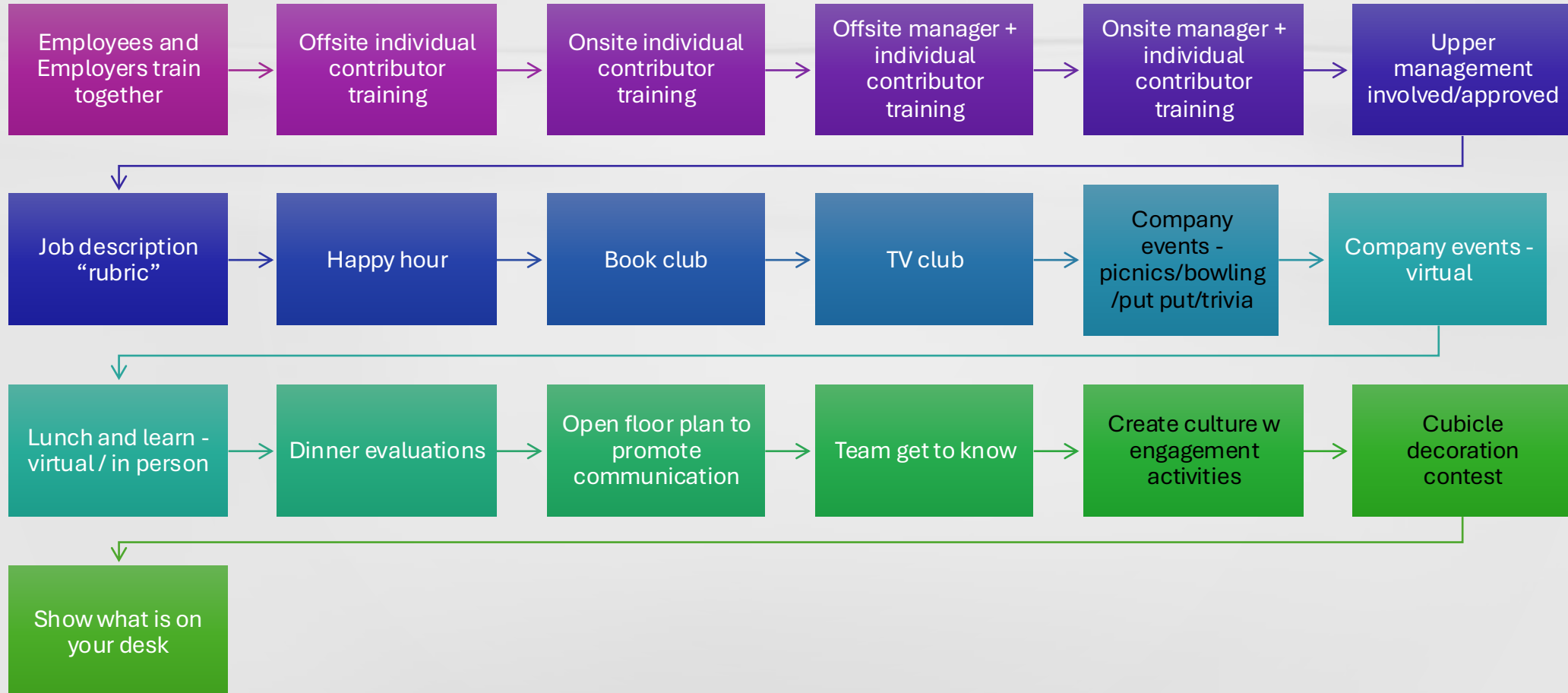
Tag to a competency (communication, ownership, quality, etc.)

Brainstorming Process and Selected Ideas




- Empower employee
- Empower manager
- AI assist feedback coach
- “Personality” training
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): Classifies individuals into 16 different personality types based on four dichotomies (e.g., introversion vs. extroversion).
- CliftonStrengths (formerly StrengthsFinder): Identifies an individual's top strengths out of 34 different talent themes.
- DISC Training: 4 different personality traits; how best to communicate with peers, coworkers, family, friend
- True Colors - At True Colors, we deliver a proven culture-building system that aligns people, performance, and purpose. Through a shared language and actionable tools, we help you hire smarter, build stronger teams, and develop more effective leaders. For over 45 years, we've helped organizations move from culture confusion to culture confidence.
- Building in collaborative time
- Self development hour - for networking, mentorship, linkedin learning
- Paid training time (thru linkedin learning, provided apps)
- 360 feedback (peers, manager, next level manager, HR)
- Offsite manager training

Brainstorming Process and Selected Ideas



Brainstorming Process and Selected Ideas

- 
- Creating 'fun' culture
 - Company events
 - Get to know you
 - Cubicle decoration contest
 - Team building
 - Personality training
 - DISC
 - Meyers-briggs
 - True Color
 - CliftonStrengths
 - Feedback warm up ritual
 - Before discussing challenges, begin every feedback session with a 1-minute "strength warm-up," such as:
 - A recent win
 - A specific skill the employee has improved
 - A teammate praise from the week
 - This primes the brain for openness rather than defensiveness.

Criteria used to select these ideas:

- Cost
- Feasibility
- Size of company
- "Is the juice worth the squeeze?"
- Does it support retention?
- Is there good buy-in for employees and managers (beneficial for all parties)?

Solution Statement:

Creating an open environment through culture and understanding, the problem cannot become a problem in the first place. By empowering the employees and managers, communication is opened and everyone can take accountability.

Process:

As a team, we initially generated the first ten to twenty ideas through a more structured brainstorming process. After that point, however, our approach became increasingly open-ended. We shifted into a more spontaneous mode of thinking aloud, allowing us to bounce ideas off one another and build on emerging concepts in real time. For many of us, this meant starting by reflecting on what our company currently does to cultivate a collaborative environment. From there, we naturally transitioned into discussing comparable experiences we had encountered in previous roles or group settings. This blend of organizational reflection and personal experience helped us broaden our perspective and ultimately enriched the second half of our idea-generation process.

Prototypes & User Feedback

Problem statement: Employees often find it difficult to receive feedback without feeling

criticized or demotivated, which can hinder their growth and performance. Meanwhile,

managers struggle to deliver feedback that is clear, constructive, and encouraging,

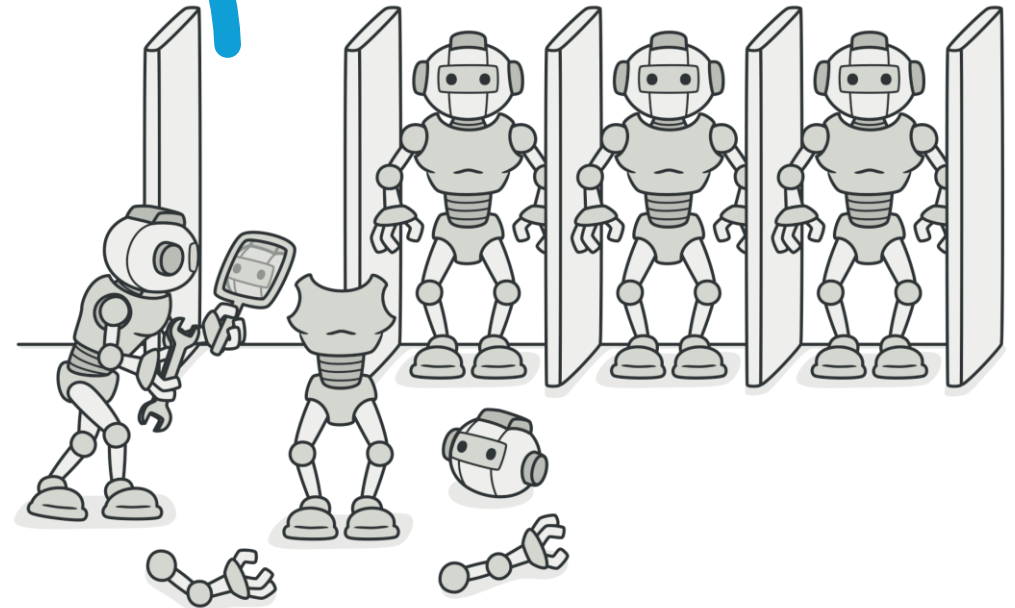
balancing honesty with empathy to maintain trust and engagement within their teams.

Solution Statement: Creating an open environment through culture and understanding,

the problem is not able to become a problem in the first place. By empowering the

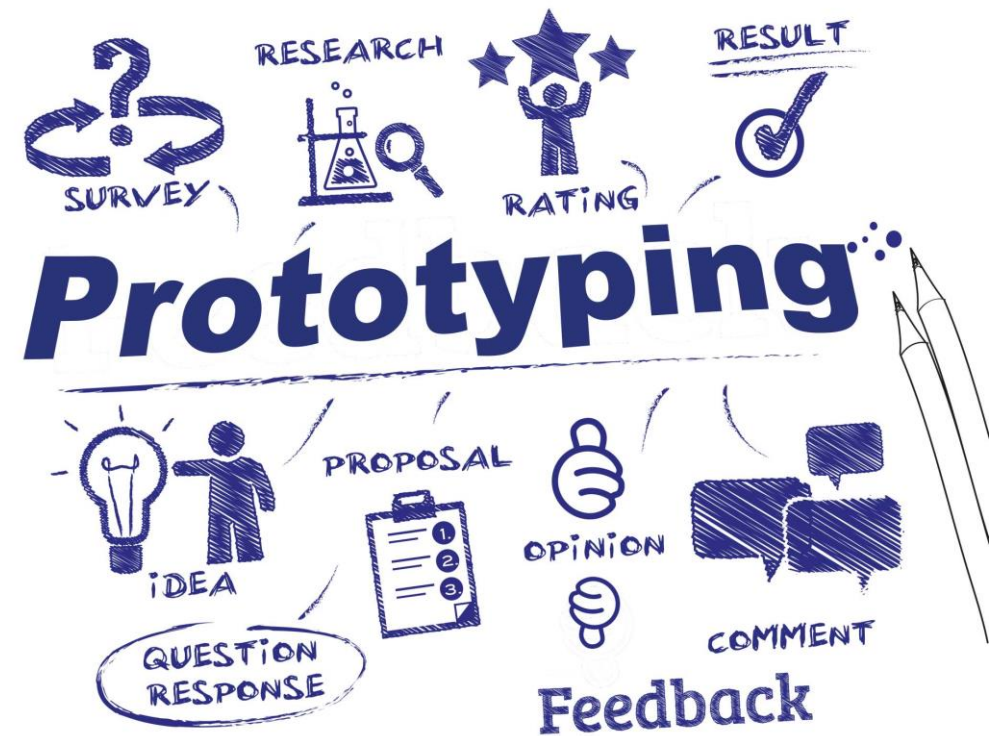
employees and managers, communication is opened and everyone can take

accountability.



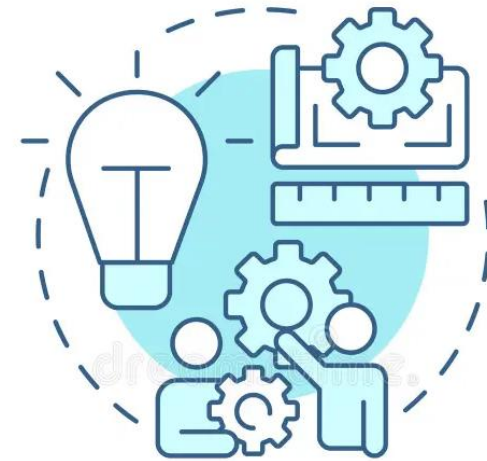
Prototypes & User Feedback

- We ultimately decided to pursue the Warm-Up Ritual concept, and our process began with an extremely low-fidelity prototype: simple index cards. Each card represented a screen or feature we imagined for the experience. Although basic, this hands-on method allowed us to quickly visualize user flow, rearrange elements, and test different structures without investing time in full digital development. From this paper prototype, we created our first functional version of the app, translating the card-based ideas into a digital format that captured the core purpose of the Warm-Up Ritual.
- After building this initial version, we returned to the individuals we had interviewed during our early research phase. This step was essential; we wanted to ensure that the app aligned with user needs rather than our assumptions. The feedback we received was detailed, practical, and in many cases, highlighted areas we had not thought about. Using this feedback, we revised our original design and integrated several suggested improvements to enhance clarity, usability, and overall user engagement.
- The updated version of the app now features a series of guided prompts that structure the Warm-Up Ritual. These include Recent Win, Improved Skill, Weekly Praise, and Challenges/Roadblocks, each designed to help users reflect on growth, acknowledge progress, and identify areas needing support. A Review and Submit button appears at the bottom, enabling users to finalize their entry before publishing.



Prototypes & User Feedback

- If users find themselves unsure of what to write or how to articulate their thoughts, the app also includes a helpful **“Need Inspiration?”** dropdown tab. This feature provides a curated set of examples, prompts, and sentence starters designed to guide users through the reflection process. Rather than leaving users to struggle with writer’s block, the inspiration tab offers gentle suggestions that can spark ideas, clarify thinking, and make it easier to begin. The goal is not to dictate responses, but to support users in expressing their experiences in a way that feels authentic and meaningful.
- Once an entry is submitted, users can choose how to share it: with their entire team, with their supervisor only or keep it private for personal reflection. Additionally, we added a dedicated space where supervisors can leave notes, reinforcing communication, feedback, and ongoing development. This combination of user-friendly prompts and flexible sharing options creates a structured, yet personalized experience aligned with the goals of the Warm-Up Ritual.
- There is also an administrative dashboard that provides designated administrators with elevated access to the app’s backend features. Through this dashboard, admins can view overall analytics, track patterns of engagement, and monitor user activity at a broader level. In addition, the dashboard includes a variety of filter options that allow administrators to sort information by employee, team, or specific time periods. These tools offer a clearer understanding of how employees are interacting with the app, enabling more informed support, oversight, and decision-making.

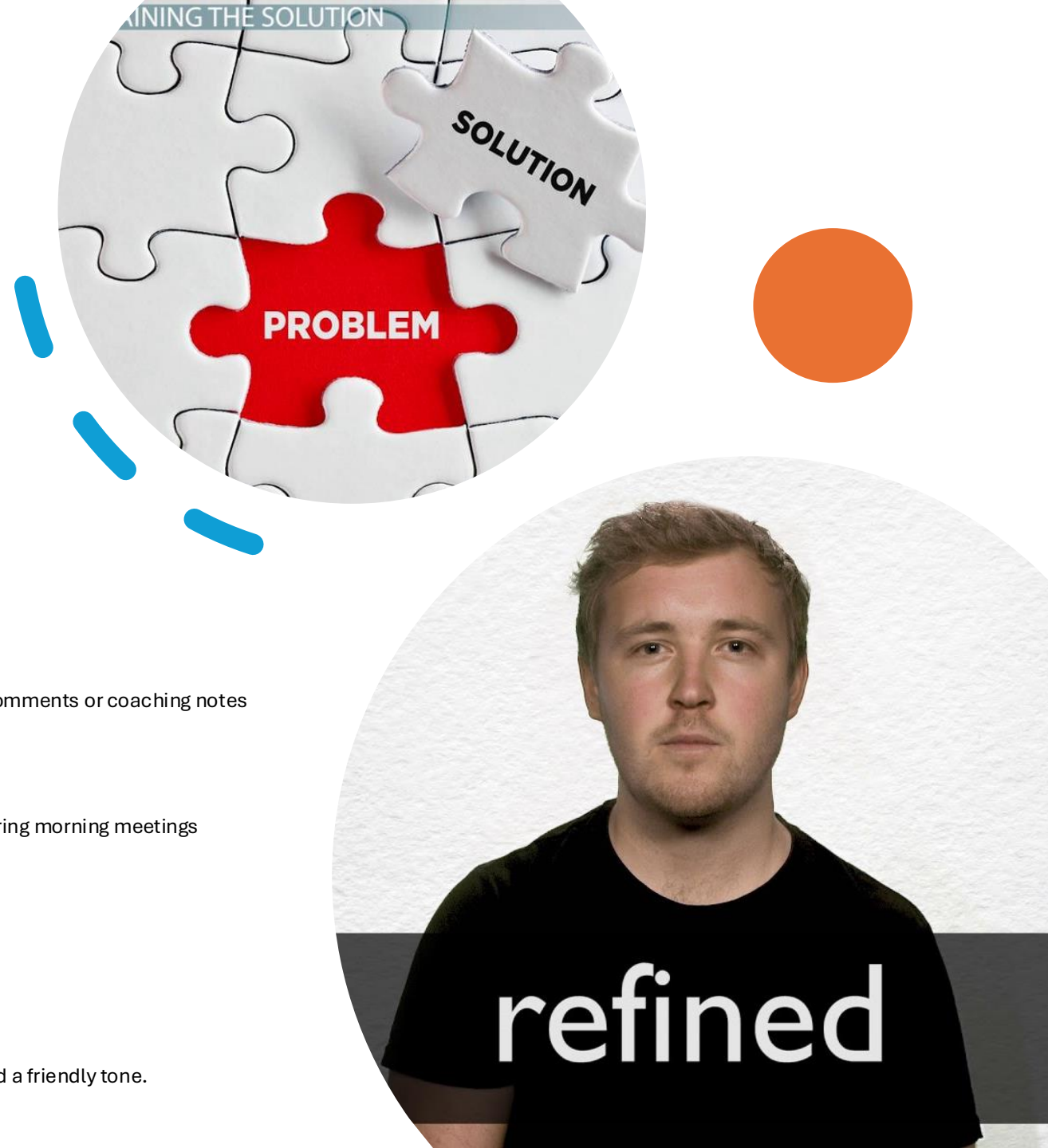


**Prototype
Development**

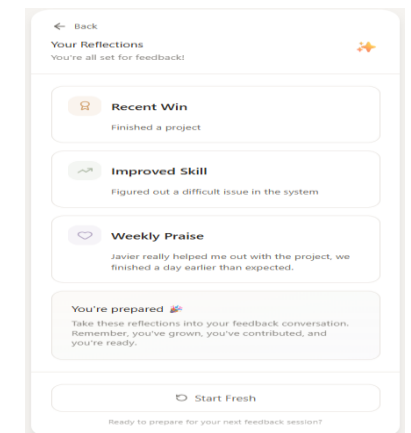
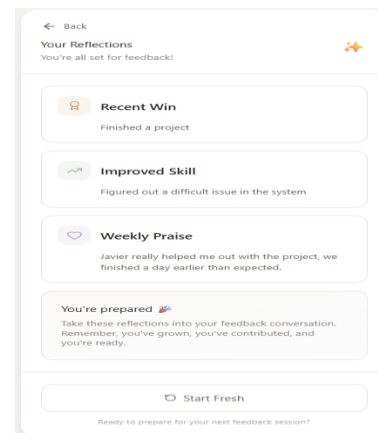
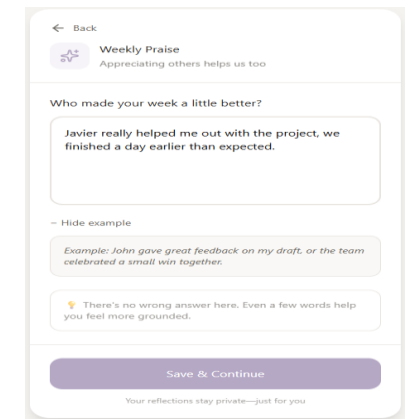
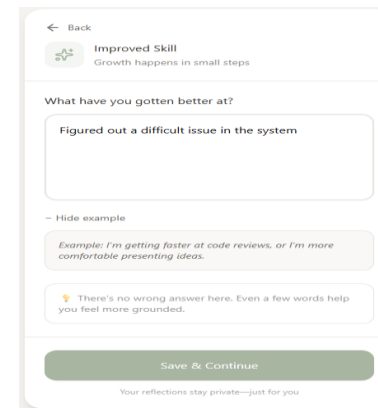
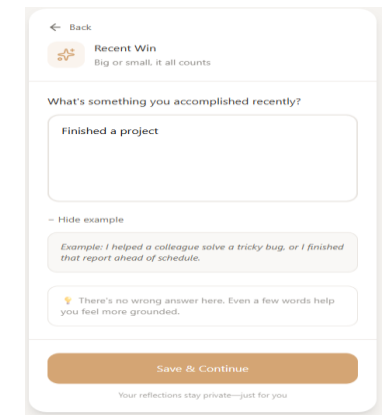
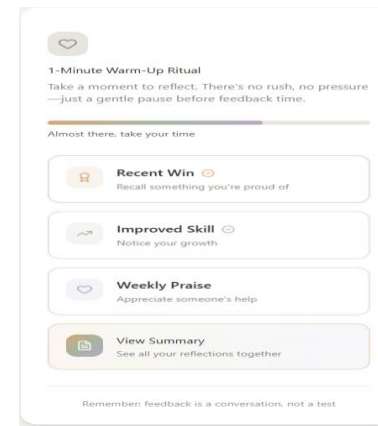
○ — EDITABLE STROKE — ○

Refined Solution

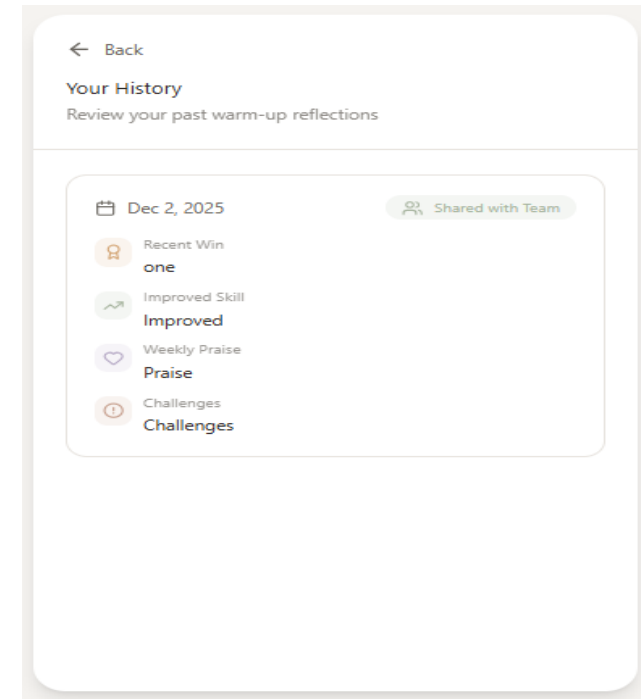
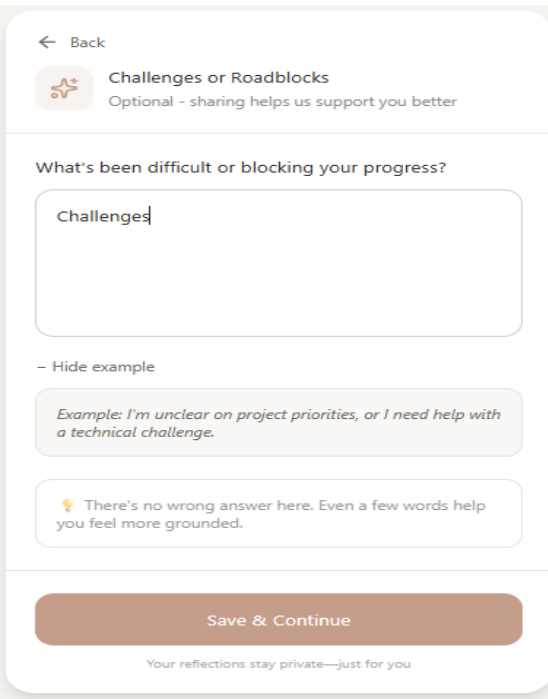
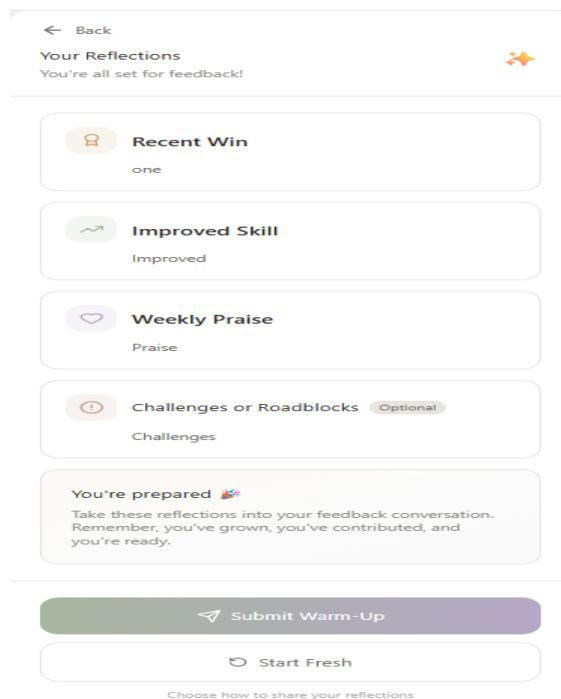
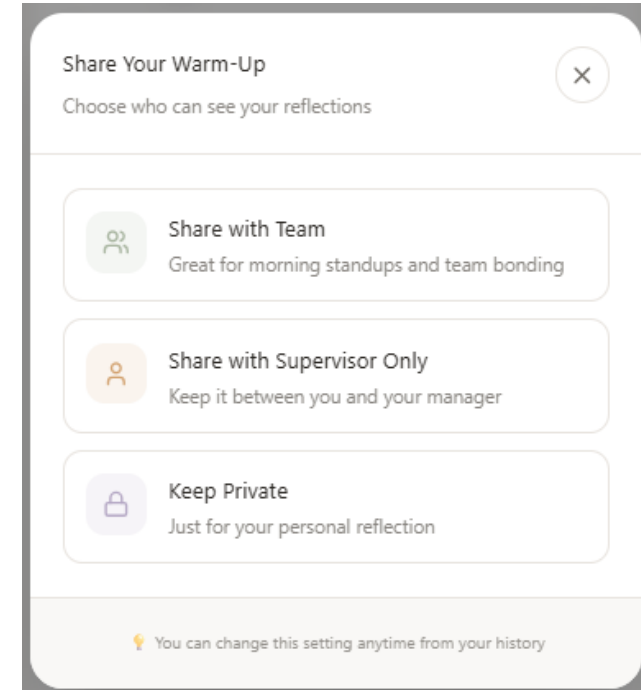
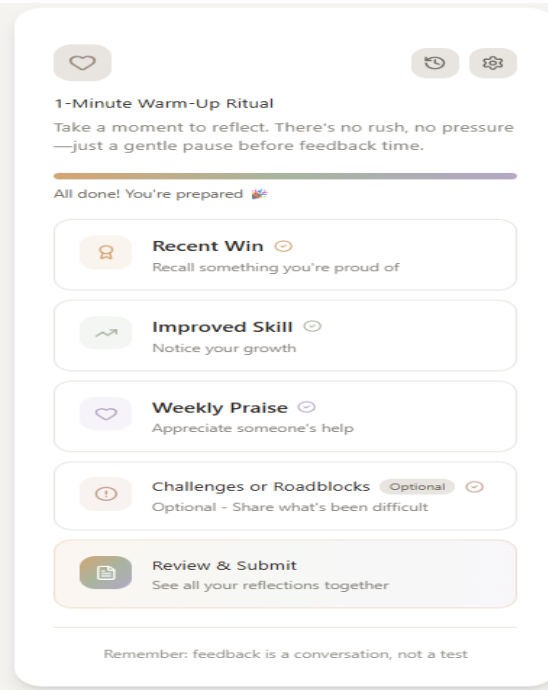
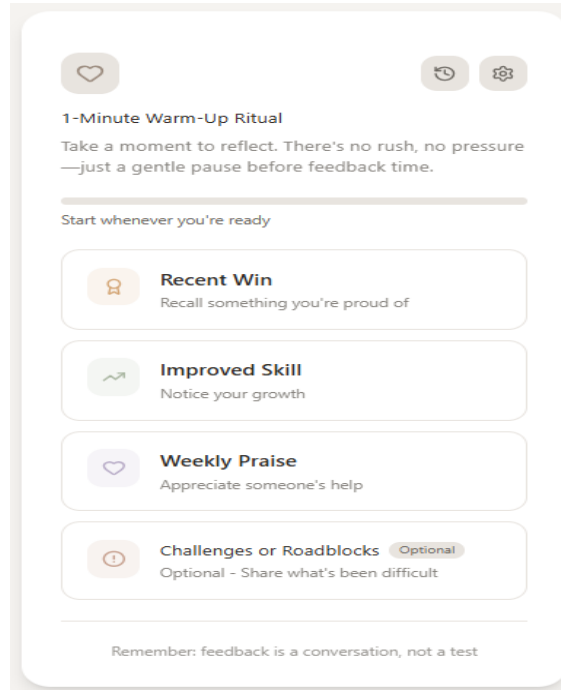
- Home/Warm-Up Screen
- Keep the three prompts: Recent Win, Improved Skill, Weekly Praise
- Add an optional fourth prompt titled 'Challenges or Roadblocks'
- Add a progress bar with 4 steps instead of 3
- Include fields: Recent Win, Improved Skill, Praise, Challenges
- Dark Mode Version
- Create a dark mode toggle in the settings screen
- Generate the dark mode UI for the warm-up input screen
- Supervisor Comment Section
- After the user submits their warm-up, add a screen where supervisors can leave brief comments or coaching notes
- Include an optional 'anonymous question' box for shy employees to submit concerns
- Sharing Option
- Add a pop-up or button that allows employees to share their warm-up with the team during morning meetings
- Include options for 'Share with Team,' 'Share with Supervisor Only,' or 'Keep Private'
- History & Tracking Screen
- Create a screen where users can view their past warm-up entries
- Admin/Supervisor Dashboard (Simple Version)
- Include a quick indicator showing who submitted their daily warm-up
- Make the design coherent, simple, and supportive, with rounded cards, clear labels, and a friendly tone.



Prototype Version 1



Final Prototype Employee Access



Warm-Up Submitted! 🎉
Your reflections have been saved

Supervisor Notes
Your manager will leave feedback here
Waiting for supervisor feedback...

Anonymous Question (Optional)
Have a concern or question you'd like to share anonymously? Your name won't be attached.

I'm wondering about... (completely anonymous)

🔒 This question is completely anonymous and will be addressed in a team meeting without identifying you.

Continue

You'll be notified when your supervisor leaves feedback