

The Role of Feedback in the Development of Managers

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Abstract: The landscape in which modern organisations operate is rapidly changing and requires managerial agility. This necessitates a frequent review of how managers are developed. The aim of this article is to examine the role of workplace feedback in employee development. This will be achieved by developing a contemporary and comprehensive definition of feedback and specifying the elements of feedback that are associated with managerial development. Employing a qualitative, non-systematic literature review approach, journal articles and textbooks published after 2015, with feedback as their primary theme, were systematically selected and analysed for their content as well as the seminal works they referred to. The analysed literature suggests that feedback forms part of a dynamic communication and learning process. Development-driven feedback is information presented to recipients regarding their behaviour and/or performance in executing work tasks, as assessed by supervisors, subordinates, peers, coworkers, or the recipients themselves, with the intent to enhance work relationships and job performance. The elements central to structuring feedback were identified as purpose, content, source, frequency, timing, and delivery. These

elements are customised to meet workplace performance requirements, also taking individual skill sets and personalised needs into account. A broad base of academic literature was captured and integrated to reach a comprehensive understanding of feedback as a development intervention. It was concluded that, although complex, literature on feedback can be consolidated to present both an inclusive definition of the concept and the elements associated with it.

Keywords: Feedback, management development, conceptualisation, literature review.

1. Introduction

Feedback is a common practice in the workplace, traditionally recognised for its role in disciplinary processes and performance appraisals. However, feedback often appears in informal, unstructured forms that may lack alignment with organisational goals. This raises an important question: how effective is feedback if it lacks clarity and direction? Before feedback can be used to develop managerial tasks or subtly enhance management skills, it is critical to examine what feedback is and how it is understood and applied in different contexts.

In light of these concerns, this research seeks to explore the conceptual underpinnings of feedback in the workplace, defining what feedback entails and identifying its core elements. By distilling insights from contemporary literature, this study aims to offer a comprehensive operational definition of feedback in the workplace and delineate its typologies. However, insights from contemporary literature would be incomplete without considering the contributions of seminal authors and classical literature in the field. The literature review that follows will therefore briefly reflect on seminal works, which will be combined with the findings to provide a more complete picture of feedback in the workplace.

This study will contribute to the field by synthesising foundational definitions and typologies of feedback as a concept, ultimately providing a more nuanced understanding of its role in management development. By examining both seminal works and contemporary perspectives, this

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research will offer a balanced view that addresses longstanding definitions while incorporating new insights into feedback's utility in modern organisations. The purpose is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of feedback but rather to concentrate on defining the concept and exploring the typologies, with a focus on commonalities in contemporary research. This is vital for constructing more appropriate and sophisticated models of management development and for designing interventions that are well-suited to the evolving complexities of the managerial landscape.

2. Literature review

The literature review that follows reflects on the essential building blocks of the scientific knowledge framework – concepts, definitions, and typologies – while excluding broader discussions on models and theories (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In doing so, the study aims to enhance the clarity and application of feedback in workplace settings, recognising that its impact is both organisational and personal, contributing to employee development and performance.

2.1 The concept of feedback

Feedback has been referred to as an individual's "knowledge of performance" (Ammons, 1956; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) or "knowledge of results" (Greller & Herold, 1975; Travers, 1977; Saks, 2015; Johnson et al., 2023), specifically in the realms of psychology and education, dating as far back as 1905 (Judd, 1905; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

Over the decades, feedback has evolved, gaining substantial interest in corporate environments. Hedge et al. (2001) trace the history of feedback, particularly multisource feedback, to the early 1900s. Their exploration illustrates that while the terminology has changed, the fundamental concept of collecting and using data to understand an individual's performance has been around for decades. Similarly, Church et al. (2018) offer an overview of the evolution of 360-degree feedback, which was initially introduced as an assessment tool for evaluating leadership capabilities in the 1960s. Fleenor et al. (2020) state that 360-degree feedback was used as a development tool for managers, while organisations employed standardised methods to collect feedback on behaviour in the 1970s. Johnson et al. (2023) briefly delve into the history of feedback and discuss a case study of Emery Air Freight (1971) and the contributions of Edward J. Feeney (1972) to demonstrate how feedback and reinforcement can enhance organisational performance by bridging the gap between "assumed and actual performance" (Johnson et al., 2023, p. 66).

Feedback has since become a focal point in organisations as part of strategies for improvement and advancement (Baker et al., 2013; McCarthy & Garavan, 2001; Garavan et al., 1997), as well as for individual development, particularly in management skills enhancement and improving work behaviour and performance (Bailey & Austin, 2006; Maurer et al., 2002; Hazucha et al., 1993; Bastos & Fletcher, 1995; Walker & Smither, 1999; Tyson & Ward, 2004). Ashford and Cummings (1983) emphasise that while feedback is vital for organisational dynamics, it must also be recognised as a valuable resource for employees themselves.

Despite some negative connotations related to studies on the efficacy of feedback on performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), it remains an uncontested concept in research and is integral to organisational performance management (Johnson et al., 2023). Notably, as discussed in this study, contemporary researchers agree that feedback must be used appropriately to have a positive impact on performance (Johnson et al., 2023; Dixit & Sinha, 2021; Budworth et al., 2019; Chandler & Grealish, 2019; Hirsch, 2017).

2.2 Definition statements of feedback

The notion of feedback has undergone refinement over the past half-century, resulting in contemporary definitions that distil the essence of the concept and its role in organisational behaviour management (Johnson et al., 2023). Notable seminal definitions of feedback date back to

the 1970s and have influenced more contemporary views (Ilgen et al., 1979; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ramaprasad, 1983; Bastos & Fletcher, 1995; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Baker et al., 2013). According to Ilgen et al. (1979, p. 350), feedback is “a special case of the general communications process in which some sender conveys a message to a recipient.” Ashford and Cummings (1983, p. 372) define feedback as a “subset of information available to individuals in their work environment” and state that feedback “is information that denotes how well individuals are meeting various goals.” Ramaprasad (1983, p. 4) criticises earlier theorists’ lack of a clear definition of feedback, stating that feedback is “information about a gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way.” Bastos and Fletcher (1995, p. 29) define feedback as “information about the effectiveness of one’s work behaviour,” considering feedback an “important element of a work environment.” Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 81) state that “feedback is conceptualised as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding.” Baker et al. (2013, p. 260) describe feedback as a “dynamic communication process occurring between two individuals that conveys information regarding the receiver’s performance in the accomplishment of work-related tasks.” The earlier seminal definitions, employing terms like “general,” “some sender,” “information available,” “about a gap,” and “effectiveness of one’s work behaviour,” evolved into more precise expressions such as “information provided regarding aspects of performance” within a “dynamic communication process” essential for achieving “work-related tasks.” This progression highlights the heightened clarity and intent of feedback in the workplace. The refinement of the feedback definition reflects the current understanding of the concept. A further examination of definitions formulated and/or used since 2015 is presented in the Findings section.

2.3 Typologies of feedback

Typologies take many forms and classify or categorise phenomena based on shared characteristics or different forms (Mouton & Marais, 1996). The typologies of feedback are guided by these forms, which are specifically determined by the source of the feedback. For feedback to be effective, it must address distinct questions: where am I going (feed up), how am I going (feed back), and where to next (feed forward) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Sources of feedback are the individuals who participate in the assessment process and provide feedback via structured questionnaires and/or narrative comments (Smither & Walker, 2004). These participants may consist solely of subordinates, or they may comprise a collective made up of subordinates, peers, supervisors, self, and internal and external customers (or “others”) (Bailey & Austin, 2006). Feedback from subordinates only is known as upward feedback (Bayer et al., 2020; Walker & Smither, 1999; Reilly et al., 1996; Smither et al., 1995). Feedback from a collective is termed multisource multi-rater feedback (MSMR) or 360-degree feedback (Dai et al., 2010; Atwater & Brett, 2005; Bailey & Fletcher, 2002; Maurer et al., 2002; Brett & Atwater, 2001; Brutus et al., 1999; Rosti & Shipper, 1998; Garavan et al., 1997; London & Smither, 1995; Hazucha et al., 1993). These seminal studies indicate that different sources of feedback have varying impacts on productivity, behaviour, and performance, which necessitates conscious consideration of the types of feedback to be used as a development strategy. Further examination of the elements of feedback based on contemporary literature (from 2015 onwards) is presented in the Findings section.

3. Methods

This section discusses the importance of the non-systematic literature review and the deliberate decision to undertake such a review. It outlines the data collection process, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the analytical methods used to arrive at the findings.

3.1 Non-systematic literature review

A conscious decision was made to follow a non-systematic literature review approach that blends normative and empirical literature from textbooks and journal articles (McDougall, 2015) to extract key ideas. It was essential to incorporate grey literature from various sources beyond journal articles to align with the value of employing diverse sources in the study (Adams et al., 2017). The review provides informative, in-depth material without systematically addressing a specific research question (Huelin et al., 2015).

The non-systematic approach primarily focuses on the qualitative interpretation of the reviewed research outcomes, which were identified using a systematic method. The type of analysis, non-systematic, should not be confused with the process used to source the data, which was systematic.

3.2 Data collection

The population comprised all academic literature published on feedback. Two search engines were utilised to identify relevant literature. The first search employed Harzing's Publish or Perish application, with Google Scholar as the primary data source. The second search utilised the EBSCOHost research platform, which provided access to 50 different databases, including Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, Business Source Ultimate, and ERIC. The inclusion and exclusion criteria described below were carefully tailored for both searches. Additionally, the citations and reference lists of identified literature were scrutinised for further relevant sources.

This study aims to define feedback and specify its elements through data collected from published articles and textbooks. A non-systematic literature review protocol was employed to select literature pertinent to the study. The various databases were searched using the keywords "feedback", "feedback + workplace", "feedback + workplace + development", "feedback + management + development", "feedback + performance", and "multisource feedback".

3.3 Inclusive and exclusive criteria

The Harzing's Publish or Perish application allows for customisation of search criteria based on author, date, publication name, title words, and keywords. It also features a valuable sorting option once the search is complete, enabling users to focus on cited research outputs based on the number of citations, author name, title, year, publication, publisher, and type of publication (i.e. whether it is a book, citation, or HTML). The maximum number of results per search is 1,000, which was selected for data collection. The search results can be saved for future use. EBSCOHost allows for further refinement of results beyond keywords, title, author, and publication date, including source types, subjects, languages, and databases. While the search results are not saved, selected publications can be stored in a folder for future use, and there is no restriction on the number of search results. For all searches, only publications written in English with a publication date between 2015 and 2023 were considered.

Titles, abstracts, and contents of the literature were scrutinised to ensure relevance, with a specific focus on excluding "other" feedback and development topics, primarily those related to teacher-student-classroom and patients-clinicians-medical students. The final results are discussed in the Findings section.

3.4 Data analysis

The research outcomes extracted from EBSCOHost and Harzing's Publish or Perish were thoroughly examined. Definition statements were identified by probing for instances where the terms "define" or "definition" were associated with feedback. The definitions were then thematically analysed to derive a single inclusive definition, an approach successfully employed by Solomon and Steyn (2017) and Schutte and Steyn (2015).

Typologies and elements were identified by searching through tables, lists, and bulleted text in the feedback literature. The typologies and elements were gleaned from the literature, and a table was generated to organise the findings, including the author, title, year, journal or book name, a brief description of the literature, and the findings of the study. The elements and uses of feedback were collated from the literature to identify commonalities. These findings are discussed in the following section and integrated into the overall discussion.

4. Presentation of Findings

Presented below are the findings from the literature search. Firstly, the extracted data, including the number of publications found and the number eventually included in the study, is discussed. This is followed by the definition statements gleaned from the located sources and, finally, the findings regarding feedback typologies.

4.1 Data extraction

Employing “feedback” as a keyword and applying the inclusive and exclusive criteria described in the research methodology section, the results from the EBSCOHost search yielded 469,955 hits. However, the term “feedback” is broadly used, and additional keywords were required to narrow the results to identify relevant publications. Thus, using this method, “feedback” with “workplace” provided 821 hits, while “feedback” combined with “workplace” and “development” resulted in nine hits. “Feedback” with “development” (excluding “workplace”) yielded 6,756 hits. Using “feedback” with “performance” produced 17,258 hits. An additional search using “multisource feedback” yielded 414 results. Since this study focuses on feedback in the workplace and its impact on development, only publications relevant to this focus were selected. The EBSCOHost search ultimately yielded 25 publications relevant to this study. After an in-depth review of the literature, a total of 22 publications remained, of which two are books.

The search on Harzing’s Publish or Perish using only “feedback” as a keyword yielded 997 publications. When applying the keywords “feedback” and “performance”, 200 results were returned. “Feedback” with “management development” returned 199 results, while “feedback” with only “development” returned 983 results. A search using the keywords “feedback”, “workplace”, and “development” yielded 983 results. “Multisource feedback” produced 989 publications. Overall, Harzing’s Publish or Perish search provided 16 publications that could be regarded as relevant to this study. After a thorough review, one publication was discarded and replaced, maintaining a total of 16 publications, eight of which are books.

A total of 38 publications were selected for this study: 22 from EBSCOHost, two of which are books, and 16 from Harzing’s Publish or Perish, eight of which are books. All selected publications were used to identify a definition statement and elements or typologies, although not all contained a definition or provided typologies.

The following sections present the findings reported in the aforementioned sources, specifically the extrapolated definitions and typologies of feedback.

4.2 Definition statements

Of the selected publications, 13 presented a definition of feedback formulated by the authors. An additional three definitions were drawn from seminal works. These are all presented verbatim below:

Johnson et al. (2023, p. 65): “[P]erformance feedback in organisations is defined as the provision of information specifically given to change or maintain performance.”

Giamos et al. (2023, p. 3): “[I]n the context of performance management, feedback content refers to information that is provided to employees and which relates to their performance.”

Wang and Zhang (2022, p. 220): “[S]upervisor developmental feedback refers to the extent to which supervisors provide useful or valuable information to employees so that employees can learn, develop, and improve their work.”

Gjerde et al. (2022, p. 56): Feedback “refers to any information that is provided to learners about their performance on, or understanding of, some task, assignment, or activity” (inspired by Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Lipnevich and Panadero (2021, p. 25): “[F]eedback is information that includes all or several [of the following] components: students’ current state, information about where they are, where they are headed and how to get there, and can be presented by different agents (i.e., peer, teacher, self, task itself, computer).”

Fleenor (2021, p. 222): “[I]n the organisational context, feedback is defined as information provided to employees related to their behaviour on the job and the impact of that behaviour on others.”

Fleenor et al. (2020, p. 8): “[F]eedback is usually defined as information provided to an employee related to the behaviour of that person on the job and the results of that behaviour.”

Chandler and Grealish (2019, p. 54): Feedback is “clear and specific information that’s sought or extended with the sole intention of helping individuals or groups improve, grow, or advance”.

Church et al. (2019, p. 79): Feedback is “information collected from multiple stakeholders about an employee’s behaviour and accomplishments to support future development, performance, and talent management decisions”.

Bracken et al. (2016, p. 764): Feedback is “a process for collecting, quantifying, and reporting coworker observations about an individual (i.e., a ratee) that facilitates/enables three specific data-driven/based outcomes: (a) the collection of rater perceptions of the degree to which specific behaviours are exhibited; (b) the analysis of meaningful comparisons of rater perceptions across multiple ratees, between specific groups of raters for an individual ratee, and for ratee changes over time; and (c) the creation of sustainable individual, group, and/or organisational changes in behaviours valued by the organisation”.

Kim et al. (2016, p. 1569): Feedback is “multisource feedback (MSF) refers to a process whereby subordinates, peers, supervisors, and/or customers provide recipients with feedback concerning their work behaviours and/or performance”.

Fletcher (2015, p. 486): Feedback “refers to a process whereby an individual (usually referred to as the focal manager) completes a self-rating on behaviours associated with each of several competencies, and is also rated on those same behaviours by bosses, peers, subordinates, and team members”.

Van den Bossche et al. (2015, p. 503): “[F]eedback can be defined as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) about aspects of performance or understanding.”

These contemporary definitions demonstrate that authors agree feedback involves gathering information pertinent to an individual (Church et al., 2019; Bracken et al., 2016), providing this information to them (Johnson et al., 2023; Fleenor et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2016; Van den Bossche et al., 2015), and connecting it to their workplace behaviour (Fleenor et al., 2020; Church et al., 2019; Bracken et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016) and/or their job performance (Johnson et al., 2023; Giamos et al., 2023; Church et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Van der Bossche et al., 2015). Feedback is primarily given to identify work behaviours and the impact of these behaviours in the workplace, as articulated by Fleenor (2021), Fleenor et al. (2020), Church et al. (2019), Bracken et al. (2016), and Fletcher (2015). The intent of feedback should be to foster learning, growth, and performance improvement among individuals and teams, as well as to gauge task comprehension (Wang & Zhang, 2022; Gjerde et al., 2022; Chandler & Grealish, 2019). It can also be used to acknowledge achievements and future prospects for talent management purposes (Church et al., 2019) and to sustain current performance

levels (Johnson et al., 2023). Ideally, it can assess an individual's present and future status (Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021). Feedback can originate from various sources, including self, peers, colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, and customers (Bracken et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016).

It is noteworthy that some authors draw from seminal works to define feedback:

Zada et al. (2022, p. 2463) reference Ilgen et al. (1979, p. 350), who propose that feedback is "a special case of the general communication process in which a sender conveys a message to a recipient that comprises information about the recipient's behaviour and performance." Mertens, Schollaert, and Anseel (2021, p. 327) favour Baker et al.'s (2013, p. 260) definition that feedback is "a dynamic communication process occurring between two individuals that conveys information regarding the receiver's performance in the accomplishment of work-related tasks." Budworth et al. (2019, pp. 47–48) quote Kluger and DeNisi (1996, p. 255), who state that feedback interventions are "actions taken by an employee's supervisor to provide information regarding task performance." The first two examples highlight an important element of feedback, namely the communication process. It is noteworthy that the term "process" has not appeared in definitions formulated since 2019. There is consensus that feedback is primarily about providing information to a recipient. Furthermore, Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) definition is of interest since they use the term "feedback intervention (FI)," which could be highly relevant to a development programme.

In light of the definitions quoted above, the following operational definition of feedback is proposed:

Feedback, as part of a dynamic communication and learning process, is information presented to recipients on their behaviour and/or performance in executing work tasks as assessed by supervisors, subordinates, peers or coworkers and recipients themselves, with the intent to enhance work relationships and job performance.

4.3 Typologies

In this section of the findings, the focus is on the various typologies of feedback in the workplace. The results were derived from a non-systematic review of published literature from 2015 onwards, encompassing all 38 publications. In addition to the typology of feedback sources discussed in the literature review section, several clusters of feedback presentation typologies were identified. Distinct typologies of feedback emerged, including purpose, content, source, timing, and frequency. Furthermore, alternative approaches to feedback, such as feedforward, were proposed. The elements are discussed below.

Purpose: When considering the purpose of feedback, or why it is important and necessary, the literature clearly indicates that feedback serves as a performance development tool (Johnson et al., 2023; Sibunruang & Kawai, 2023; Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Ellison et al., 2022; Fleenor, 2021; Panadero & Lipnevich, 2021; Fleenor et al., 2020; Church et al., 2019; Church et al., 2018; Bracken et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2015; London & Mone, 2015; Van den Bossche et al., 2015), influencing behaviour (Johnson et al., 2023; Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Sureda et al., 2021; Fleenor et al., 2020; Budworth et al., 2019; Steffens et al., 2018; Besieux, 2017; London & Mone, 2015). Feedback can promote growth (Freebairn-Smith, 2023), enhance self-awareness (Freebairn-Smith, 2023; Ellison et al., 2022; Zada et al., 2022; Church et al., 2019), motivate individuals to improve (Giamos, 2023), facilitate workplace learning (Wang & Zhang, 2022; Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021), and encourage knowledge sharing (Kim et al., 2016). Additionally, feedback can provide insights into leader effectiveness following a development programme (Fleenor, 2021). Feedback also plays a crucial role in leader-member exchanges (LMXs) in the workplace (Katz et al., 2023; Baloch et al., 2021; Mertens et al., 2021; Xing et al., 2021), thereby enhancing the supervisor-subordinate relationship. When aligned with organisational goals, feedback enhances organisational performance (Johnson et al., 2023; Baloch et al., 2021; Fleenor, 2021; Mertens et al., 2021; Moreno et al., 2021; Fleenor et al., 2020).

Content: Drawing from Hattie and Timperley (2007), the content of feedback can be task-specific or process-specific, self-regulatory, or self-focused (Panadero & Lipnevich, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2022; Steffens et al., 2018; Besieux, 2017). Feedback can be presented as quantitative results, qualitative results in the form of narrative comments, or a combination of both (Giamos et al., 2023; Fletcher, 2015; London & Mone, 2015). It is essential to provide both negative and positive feedback results (Johnson et al., 2023; Zada et al., 2022; Xing et al., 2021; Quash et al., 2020; Budworth et al., 2019). A more strengths-based approach to feedback, rather than the classic deficit model, is advocated (Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Budworth et al., 2019). A variety of feedback types, including past- and future-oriented feedback, should be presented (Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Gjerde et al., 2022; Dixit & Sinha, 2021; Chandler & Grealish, 2019; Hirsch, 2017; Thornock, 2016).

Source: According to contemporary literature, multisource, 360-degree feedback is considered the most useful for developmental purposes (Freebairn-Smith, 2023; Johnson et al., 2023; Katz et al., 2023; Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Ellison et al., 2022; Fleenor, 2021; Moreno et al., 2021; Sureda et al., 2021; Fleenor et al., 2021; Church et al., 2019; Church et al., 2018; Bracken et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2015; London & Mone, 2015). Some studies rely solely on supervisor feedback for their analyses (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2022; Zada et al., 2022; Xing et al., 2021). Seminal studies employed an upward feedback approach, where feedback is given from subordinates to supervisors, which is less prominent in contemporary studies.

Frequency: Annual performance appraisals had their place when organisations were more stable, hierarchical, and predictable (Mertens et al., 2021). This is no longer the case, particularly post-COVID-19; thus, discussions should not be restricted to formal annual events, which can be time-consuming, inaccurate, and demotivating (Mertens & Scholleart, 2023). They do not compensate for lower levels of day-to-day interactions (Budworth & Chummar, 2022).

The literature indicates that feedback must be given regularly (Freebairn-Smith, 2023; Johnson et al., 2023; Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Mertens et al., 2021), either weekly (Freebairn-Smith, 2023), daily (Budworth & Chummar, 2022; Fleenor, 2021; London & Mone, 2015), or continuously (Giamos et al., 2023; Mertens et al., 2021; Gabelica & Popov, 2020). However, it is cautioned that feedback frequency is relative to content and context, as feedback given too quickly limits reflection and learning (Thornock, 2016), and daily negative feedback could evoke shame and emotional exhaustion (Xing et al., 2021).

Timing: Feedback must be regular (Freebairn-Smith, 2023) and ongoing (Budworth & Chummar, 2022). It can be immediate or delayed (Johnson et al., 2023; Panadero & Lipnevich, 2021), but must be well-timed to enable recipients to learn from mistakes and improve their performance in the future (Thornock, 2016). Furthermore, feedback should be delivered at a time that best serves its purpose, which may involve salary increases, promotions, or decision-making (Fleenor et al., 2020).

Delivery: The literature offers abundant guidance on delivering feedback. One-on-one, in-person sessions are encouraged (Freebairn-Smith, 2023; Fleenor, 2021); however, hybrid working arrangements necessitate virtual sessions, or giving feedback in print or via email (Johnson et al., 2023). A favourable feedback environment and culture must be cultivated (Ellison et al., 2022; Quash et al., 2020; Chandler & Grealish, 2019). Preparation, self-reflection, and a growth mindset on the part of the supervisor are essential to ensure a comfortable conversation (Quash et al., 2020). The person giving feedback must be considerate (Baloch et al., 2021), taking cultural nuances into account (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). Feedback results must be accurate (London & Mone, 2015), and there must be a sense of trust for the recipient to accept the feedback (Johnson et al., 2023; Baloch et al., 2021; Chandler & Grealish, 2019). Negative feedback is important and should preferably be delivered on its own to avoid confusing the message (Johnson et al., 2023), as can occur with the feedback sandwich. The feedback wrap is proposed as an alternative (Hirsch, 2017). Supervisor training to deliver negative feedback is recommended (Zada et al., 2022; Mertens et al., 2021; Xing et al., 2021).

to create awareness that constructive feedback is important to others (Abi-Esber et al., 2022). Feedback failure can partly be attributed to poor quality of delivery (Fleenor, 2021).

5. Discussion

In total, 38 publications were selected based on the described search protocol and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The publications date from 2015 to 2023, with 30 published in the last five years. The search protocol took the form of a non-systematic literature review. Ten books were included; the rest of the publications were journal articles. The articles were published in journals such as the *Journal of Organisational Behaviour Management* and the *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*. Two articles appeared in each of the aforementioned journals; no other journal contributed more than one article to the selection. A review of the literature was conducted to find appropriate definitions of the concept and the elements or typologies of workplace feedback in order to enhance scholars' understanding of the concept.

Of the selected publications, 13 provided a definition of feedback. These definitions were used to formulate an operational definition of feedback. An additional three publications used definitions first published in seminal works. The contemporary definitions were compared with the seminal definitions. Most notably, the more recent publications – those from 2019 onwards – do not use the term “process” as seminal authors did.

The definitions in previous publications were used to formulate an operational definition of feedback:

Feedback, as part of a dynamic communication and learning process, is information presented to recipients about their behaviour and/or performance in executing work tasks as assessed by supervisors, subordinates, peers or coworkers, and the recipients themselves, with the intent to enhance work relationships and job performance.

By using all 38 publications to extract typologies and elements of feedback, the review facilitated the categorisation of elements deemed most significant. An attempt was made to distil commonalities and categorise them under purpose, content, source, frequency, timing, and delivery. The outcome indicated that the primary purpose of feedback is development: to positively affect behaviour, enhance the subordinate-supervisor relationship, and improve organisational performance. The content of feedback can be quantitative only or a combination of quantitative data and qualitative narrative comments. A strength-based approach, presenting both negative and positive feedback, is strongly recommended. The source of feedback may be solely the supervisor or subordinate, but multisource feedback is provided by peers, coworkers, and the recipients themselves. Regarding frequency, the literature indicates that feedback must be given frequently but cautions against giving it too quickly, as this may detract from reflection and learning. The timing of feedback is important and should align with its purpose, allowing for learning from mistakes. Finally, the delivery of feedback must be emphasised: the preparation of both the giver and receiver is important; a considerate conversation, a constructive growth-oriented mindset, and cultural sensitivity are strongly encouraged. Feedback must be accurate and should include negative comments.

6. Conclusion

Modern organisations operate in complex and challenging environments, and their managers should be forward-thinking and agile. In an age of rapid change and technological advancements, particularly with the emergence of artificial intelligence and the influx of younger, tech-savvy individuals entering the workplace, the way managers are developed must be reviewed. This article turns to feedback as a tool that should be utilised in the development of managers. Feedback is most commonly associated with performance appraisals and less so with development. It is therefore timely to review the contemporary definitions and elements of feedback. Contemporary literature

focusing solely on manager or leader development using feedback is scarce. However, the literature selected for this study provided sufficient definitions to formulate an operational definition. In addition, it identified comprehensive and descriptive elements of feedback. Clear themes were highlighted, such as the importance of preparation by both the giver and receiver of feedback, the necessity of a growth mindset, and the significance of trust between the rater and ratee, particularly when the rater is the supervisor. Importantly, feedback deepens self-awareness, which is a key characteristic of all good managers.

This study has thus successfully achieved its purpose in that the concept of feedback has been defined, its typologies have been explored, and commonalities have been identified, providing clarity from both a broader and contemporary perspective.

6.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to the existing literature by investigating current interpretations and components of feedback in the workplace, proposing a practical definition, consolidating the typologies, and demonstrating their value for the development of managers. Seminal and contemporary publications were combined, creating a usable platform from which future research can flourish.

6.2 Practical implications

The findings of the research, along with the structure it provides, can be utilised by individuals and teams to enhance feedback systems for performance and development. The findings highlight the importance of detailed, target-directed supervisor training in delivering feedback and underscore the necessity of feedback orientation and a suitable feedback environment. Additionally, there is a clear movement towards a future-oriented, strength-based feedback system that incorporates feedforward tactics and interviews.

6.3 Future research

As part of an ongoing scholarly conversation on feedback in the workplace, particularly within a management development programme, conducting quantitative research on feedback and its outcomes for developing managers would be valuable to practitioners. An abundance of qualitative studies, often diluted by confirmation bias, hinders advances in this field. Furthermore, research on how feedback can empower and motivate subordinates to contribute to organisational goal achievement and success would be advantageous. This would be especially pertinent if cultivating managers' feedback orientation and fostering a feedback environment were integrated into the individual and organisational development strategy.

6.4 Limitations and recommendations

The study was delimited to publications dating from 2015 to 2023. Although seminal works were discussed in the literature review, it would be presumptuous to claim that all literature on feedback in the workplace was covered by this study. Another limitation was the qualitative approach taken in the literature review, which had a narrow focus on definitions and elements of feedback in the workplace. This was not a quantitative study, nor did it consider any empirical findings on the impact of feedback. As a result, the reader remains uninformed about the effects of feedback. Additionally, a further limitation is the selection of English texts only, which excludes texts in other languages that report on feedback in the workplace in countries where English is not the lingua franca.

Feedback has a negative connotation and is often avoided at all costs. However, this study examined feedback from a generally positive growth and development perspective. Church et al. (2019) caution that feedback, if not used purposefully, becomes merely an event. They emphasise that, regardless

of its intent, feedback is a powerful tool that requires mindful use and application to avoid causing unintended or unnecessary harm.

7. Declarations

Authors contributions: Conceptualisation (S.C. & R.S.); literature review (S.C.); methodology (S.C. & R.S.); software (N/A); validation (R.S.); formal analysis (S.C. & R.S.); investigation (S.C. & R.S.); data curation (S.C.); drafting and preparation (S.C. & R.S.); review and editing (R.S.); supervision (R.S.); project administration (S.C.); funding acquisition (R.S.). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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