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Managerial Skills: The Design of a Feedback Questionnaire

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Abstract: Formal management development interventions can be costly, with expenses related to acquiring and administering questionnaires. This impedes the implementation of an effective intervention. This research developed a management skills questionnaire that is fit for evaluating skill levels and changes in these skills over time, and is freely available to researchers and practitioners. Existing management skills questionnaires are often expensive, lengthy, and complex to administer. There is a need for a simpler and more accessible assessment tool. The questionnaire and accompanying manual were developed through a systematic review of literature on management, management development, and workplace feedback. Initial items and guidelines were drafted from the literature and subsequently refined through multiple iterative rounds of expert consultation and peer review, ensuring conceptual clarity, relevance, and practical applicability. A 30-item questionnaire covering 15 separate management skills was designed. The questions exhibit high content and face validity, corroborated by specialists and colleagues. A manual on using the questionnaire for feedback was also developed. Through an elaborate development process, a short questionnaire was created to comprehensively assess management skills. Additionally, a manual was developed to guide users on administering the questionnaire and providing actionable feedback. This questionnaire offers a practical and accessible means of assessing a broad spectrum of management skills, thereby supporting targeted management development initiatives. By providing managers with structured, actionable feedback, it facilitates meaningful skill enhancement and professional growth. The creation of this free, literature-based instrument, strengthened through expert endorsement, constitutes a notable contribution to the assessment and development of managerial competencies.

Keywords: Management development, feedback questionnaire, measurement instrument, content validity, face validity.

1. Introduction

Those appointed to management positions are often promoted, given technical skills, and may lack the skills necessary to effectively manage their team (McCall et al., 1988). Garavan (1997) supports the view that "technical specialists" (p. 48) are often promoted to supervisory and management positions regardless of their skills and abilities related to management. He concludes that there is an assumption that management does not require specific training or that management skills are "insignificant in the wider scheme of things" (p. 48). Garavan (1997), however, provides that these assumptions must be challenged since, in an employee's career development, education in management is a vital component. Peterson and van Fleet (2004) similarly argue that technical competence is often regarded as a "prerequisite for promotion to a managerial position" (p. 1297), which explains how many individuals advance into managerial roles. Once promoted, these managers are typically required to develop management skills and acquire managerial knowledge on the job. This is the basic premise on which management development interventions are based, providing some guidance to newcomers on how to be more effective in their roles (Mumford, 1997).

Management development interventions can be provided to new managers, those transitioning to more senior roles, and those struggling in their current positions (Watkins, 2013). Regardless of the

reason for the intervention, it is crucial to assess the current skills set of managers, both to gauge specific areas for development and to assess the impact of the intervention (CIPD, 2023). Reputable psychometric test developers such as Hogan Assessments, Saville and Holdsworth Limited (SHL) and JVR Africa Group provide valuable assessment tools for this purpose. However, these tools can be expensive and using them binds the user to the suppliers' reports and systems, which is not always ideal.

The aim of this research is to design a short assessment tool which measures a broad spectrum of managerial tasks and behaviours, with the objective of making it freely available to researchers and practitioners alike. The questionnaire will not focus on the perceptions of managers, but rather on those working alongside the managers, specifically subordinates.

2. Literature Review

Four aspects are covered in this literature review section. Firstly, management and its typologies, secondly, management development and its typologies, and thirdly, feedback in the workplace. These are then followed by some thoughts on the fourth aspect: what a good questionnaire within this context should look like. In the design of the questionnaire, management and its typologies will be used to generate the items, while the literature on management development and its typologies, as well as that on feedback in the workplace, will be used to design the manual for the questionnaire.

2.1 Management and its typologies

In a conference proceeding, Cook and Steyn (2024a) drew on the works of Daft and Marcic (2023), Griffin (2022a, 2022b), Hellriegel et al. (2019), and Whetten and Cameron (2016), noting that the conceptualisation of management and its typologies remain well established, with relatively little change in recent years. Based on their review and analysis, Cook and Steyn (2024a) concluded that management has evolved into a robust construct, encompassing the multifaceted role of an authoritative individual who must be adept at setting goals, collaborating with others, optimising resources, and leading teams in alignment with organisational objectives.

Their investigation further revealed that Fayol's (1949) typologies are the most frequently cited (Cook & Steyn, 2024a). This predominance is not surprising, as the typologies of Katz (1955), Mintzberg (1971), and Drucker (1955) share substantial overlap with Fayol's framework, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Classical and seminal management typologies and the overlaps between them, using Fayol's standard

	Fayol: Management activities				
	Planning	**Organising**	**Commanding/ Leading**	**Coordinating**	**Controlling**
Katz: Management skills	Technical Conceptual	Human Conceptual	Human Conceptual	Technical Human Conceptual	Technical Human
Mintzberg: Management roles	Entrepreneur Liaison Resource allocator	Disseminator Negotiator Entrepreneur Resource allocator	Figurehead Leader Liaison Disseminator Spokesperson Negotiator Disturbance handler Entrepreneur	Figurehead Leader Liaison Disseminator Resource allocator	Monitor Negotiator Disturbance handler Resource allocator

Drucker: Management tasks	Setting objectives and goals Establishing performance measures Developing self and others	Organising and motivating Developing self and others	Organising and motivating Developing self and others	Setting objectives and goals Organising and motivating	Setting objectives and goals Establishing performance measures

As illustrated in Table 1, Katz's framework appears to demonstrate the least alignment with Fayol's typologies. However, considering the definition synthesised from the literature, it is clear that, although central to understanding management, these typologies seem limited in their ability to address management in its entirety. For this reason, it would be unwise to focus on planning, organising, commanding/leading, coordinating, and controlling alone.

Delving deeper into the literature on management, there seems to be a change in the emphasis on the use of soft skills in the workplace (Levasseur, 2013). Several lists of management tasks indicate an emphasis on management behaviour. Moving away from hard skills, Goleman (1998) presents an ontology of the five elements of emotional intelligence at work, which are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (being adept in relationships). Waddock et al (2002) refer to inspiration (vision), integration, and improvement/innovation, the three main components of the total responsibility management system. Fazzin (2020, p. 132) refers to soft skills, in the age of the Internet of Things, as "design thinking principles, perseverance, creativity and complex problem solving logic" as requirements for everyone, adding "emotional intelligence and leadership techniques" as necessary for managers (p. 45). Tripathy (2018) contributes that communication, empathy, patience and ethics are paramount for effective people management. Liikamaa (2015) lists 29 competencies required from a manager, classified as personal and social competencies, drawn from Goleman's (1998) view. This is all suggestive of a greater emphasis on the use of soft skills in the workplace (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Amid the often complex and sometimes conflicting demands of management, the work of Whetten and Cameron (2016) provides particularly valuable clarity and guidance. Whetten and Cameron (2016) refer to management skills as self-awareness, stress management, creative problem solving, supportive communication, gaining power, motivation, conflict management, empowerment, team building, and leading change. Within the context of this paper, where the development of a feedback questionnaire is the main aim, Whetten and Cameron's work is very attractive, more specifically in light of its use by Pedraza-Rodriguez et al. (2023) to develop a questionnaire for managers. Their questionnaire was designed on Whetten and Cameron's eighth edition of developing management skills and could form the basis of the soft(er) part of the management development questionnaire for this project.

Despite its complexities, literature on general management and its typologies shows a coherent understanding of the concept. The management literature also reveals well-aligned activities, indicating a mature field with well-established foundational principles. This research will build on this trusted concept when developing a management development intervention, with the largely undisputed understanding of the concept, typologies, and behaviours offering a solid foundation upon which the intervention can be systematically constructed.

2.2 Management development and its typologies

To fully determine management development and its typologies, Cook and Steyn (2025) consulted several sources, particularly the work of Hoobler and Dowdeswell (2023), Maurer et al. (2021), Becker and Bish (2016), and Cotton (2015). The findings indicate that management development has undergone significant changes, influenced by the evolving work environment shaped by the Fourth

Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the entry of millennial generations. As a result, management development typologies have also shifted in a new direction. Considering their readings and analyses, Cook and Steyn (2025) concluded that management development is a process involving both planned and systematic formal and informal approaches. These approaches are focused on cultivating the essential capabilities, particularly skills, necessary for managers to be effective in their roles, ultimately benefiting the organisations in which they are employed.

The typologies of management development are many and encompass formal and informal, as well as soft and hard, skills interventions. Formal interventions can be augmented through coaching, learning journals, seminars, workshops, and academic programmes. Informal events usually involve learning from others, with others, and from tasks. Interventions can be tailored for the workplace or for the individual.

While management development is a well-recognised activity and important for organisational success, the authors could not locate an intervention which promises significant, broad-based value addition, with minimal formal inputs. Management development programmes are generally linked to cost-benefit analyses (Seidman et al., 2020) or return-on-investment (Jasson & Govender, 2017), where close to zero-cost is never mentioned. Could management development be realised merely by asking employees to evaluate their managers and providing those managers with the resulting feedback, without any further structured input or supplementary intervention? No articles were identified in which unedited, subliminal, latent, or covert feedback and management development appeared as part of the article title, which suggests that such interventions may not exist.

2.3 Feedback in the workplace

In a third paper, Cook and Steyn (2024b) identify several techniques regarding the provision of feedback in the workplace. Some of the authors consulted here were Johnson et al. (2023), Fleenor (2021), Church et al. (2019), and Fletcher (2015). From these readings, Cook and Steyn 2 (2024b) found that feedback is generally seen as part of a dynamic communication and learning process. Information is presented to a recipient regarding behaviour and/or performance in executing work tasks, as assessed by manager, subordinates, peers, or coworkers, and self, with the intent to enhance work relationships and job performance. They found that feedback was largely depicted as individualised, typically occurring in the context of individual performance appraisals, personal development, and disciplinary situations. The typologies of feedback were found to be based on purpose, content, feedback source, frequency, timing, and delivery. No examples could be found in the contemporary literature where broad-based feedback was used as a general management development intervention. This is where one of the main gaps in the literature and practice lies.

2.4 A good feedback questionnaire

This short section aims to highlight what could be expected from a questionnaire to be used as feedback for managerial development. Given the specific context, the content validity (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020; Steyn, 2009) is fundamental – the questionnaire needs to cover the full syllabus of what managers should do. The second important dimension is face validity (Allen et al., 2023; Steyn, 2009). The questions should be formulated in a manner allowing subordinates to easily read and understand them, whilst providing managers, who receive the feedback from the subordinates, with clear indications and cues on their performance, and (subliminally) what needs to be done (Cai et al., 2023; Drigas et al., 2022; Elgendi et al., 2018). Additionally, the questionnaire needs to be short in length to ensure a high response rate amongst the staff members (Sammut et al., 2021; Sharma, 2022).

3. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to create a comprehensive but also concise assessment tool that evaluates a wide range of managerial skills, both tasks and behaviours, based on an in-depth

literature review, which offers managers insightful and actionable feedback on how they are perceived in their managerial roles. Although many tools for measuring management skills are available, none met our requirements of being easy to administer, offering feedback on a broad range of skills, and being neither copyrighted nor costly to acquire. This study will fulfil this purpose by developing an accessible, literature-based instrument that provides meaningful developmental feedback without the constraints of commercial tools and without requiring any intervention beyond the feedback itself.

4. Research Design and Method

Central themes regarding management, management development, and feedback in the workplace, extracted through three literature reviews, were used as clues to develop a multidimensional feedback questionnaire and a user manual.

Only literature related to general management was used to develop the items for the questionnaire. The classical typologies of management, identified in the literature review (see Cook & Steyn, 2024a), informed the first part of the questionnaire's development. The grouping of themes within the concept of management is graphically presented in Table 1 of the literature review. Two questions were developed for each of the following areas: planning, organising, commanding/leading, coordinating, and controlling (described in the literature review and based on the work of Fayol (1949)). Additionally, two questions were developed for each of the 10 soft skills dimensions: self-awareness, stress management, creative problem solving, supportive communication, gaining power, motivation, conflict management, empowerment, team building, and leading change (described in the literature review and based on the work of (Whetten & Cameron, 2016). The final selection of two items per dimension emerged from broader item pools that were assembled from various academic sources, prior measurement tools, and the authors' creative contributions, ensuring that the chosen items were conceptually sound and practically applicable. The task of developing and eventually selecting these items was made easier as Pedraza-Rodriquez et al. (2023) had already published a survey on Whetten and Cameron's 2011 work.

In developing the questionnaire, three principles were applied in designing the items: only behaviour visible to subordinates was included; only behaviour over which the manager has control was addressed; and only questions directly related to the identified structure of management were considered. These principles were important as subordinates were the target participants and the ones who observed the managerial tasks and behaviours being performed. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed as feedback, and feedback that cannot be acted upon by the receiver is of less practical value than feedback that can be acted upon (Gnepp et al, 2020; Ling & Soon, 2019). Furthermore, without adhering to the conceptual framework, the questionnaire would lack a theoretical background, and it would be detached from content validity.

To ensure the robustness of the questionnaire, the authors spent several hours developing it and made sure that the set principles were respected. These items were shared with four university professors with an interest in this field. Their opinions were considered, and adjustments to the questionnaire were made. Thereafter, it was submitted to a small group of colleagues, working as middle and senior managers in professional practice, to gain feedback on the relevance and clarity of the items. They were asked to respond to the clarity of each item and whether they thought it was relevant within a general working environment. Records of this process are available from the first author upon request.

The literature on the nature of management development was useful in developing the instructions on how to use the questionnaire. The potential user of the questionnaire should be clear on what can be achieved when using it and how it fits within the general management development domain. Also

important is that a standardised procedure be used when developing questionnaires, as this directly influences the reliability and validity of the questionnaire (Kline, 2015).

The literature on feedback in the management environment was also useful in assisting the development of appropriate items and feedback which could be actionable (Winstone et al., 2017). The same literature was also useful for the design of the manual, particularly on how to use the questionnaire for management feedback. The outcomes of all the above actions are presented in the findings section of the paper.

5. Main Findings

The questionnaire addresses 15 skills: planning, organising, commanding/leading, coordinating, and controlling, all from Fayol (1949), and self-awareness, stress management, creative problem solving, supportive communication, gaining power, motivation, conflict management, empowerment, team building, and leading change, from the work of Whetten and Cameron (2016). Two questions per skill were created, and the final list of items is presented in Table 2. The use of a five-point scale is recommended, with Very Ineffective (1), Ineffective (2), Neutral (3), Effective (4) and Very Effective (5), applicable to items 1 to 10, and Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5), for items 11 to 30.

Table 2*: The items of the Feedback to improve management skills (FIMS) questionnaire*

#	Skill	Item wording
1	Planning	How effectively does your manager set your team's objectives?
2	Planning	How effectively does your manager determine the best course of action to achieve your team's objectives?
3	Organising	How effectively does your manager arrange resources, such as people, tools and time, to achieve your team's objectives?
4	Organising	How effectively does your manager arrange tasks and responsibilities to implement plans in line with your team's objectives?
5	Leading	How effectively does your manager provide direction and guidance to you and your team members in your tasks and goals?
6	Leading	How effectively does your manager take charge of the team and accept responsibility for the team's performance?
7	Coordinating	How effectively does your manager collaborate with other departments or teams of the organisation to ensure common goals are achieved?
8	Coordinating	How effectively does your manager ensure collaboration within the team to achieve team goals?
9	Controlling	How effectively does your manager monitor progress on individual tasks to achieve team goals?
10	Controlling	How effectively does your manager evaluate progress on tasks to achieve team goals?
11	Self-awareness	My manager demonstrates awareness of their own management style.
12	Self-awareness	My manager is open to receiving negative feedback and views it constructively.
13	Stress management	My manager mostly remains calm and composed when the situation at work gets very demanding.
14	Stress management	My manager helps the team stay focused when the demands are high.

#	Skill	Item wording
15	Creative problem solving	My manager mostly listens to our ideas when solving a problem within the team.
16	Creative problem solving	My manager can simplify a problem to assist us in finding a solution.
17	Supportive communication	My manager tries to understand my problem rather than just offering advice.
18	Supportive communication	My manager is supportive when providing feedback.
19	Gaining power	My manager is good at building relationships, using them positively.
20	Gaining power	My manager is skilful in managing people in senior positions within the organisation.
21	Motivation	My manager shows recognition and appreciation for our contributions and successes.
22	Motivation	My manager effectively motivates us to achieve high performance.
23	Conflict management	My manager encourages two-way discussion when there is a disagreement.
24	Conflict management	My manager is mostly proactive in addressing and preventing potential conflicts within the team.
25	Empowering	My manager mostly gives us appropriate responsibilities, allowing us to grow in our careers.
26	Empowering	My manager encourages us to participate in deciding how tasks must be done.
27	Team building	My manager is good at keeping team members working together.
28	Team building	My manager effectively manages our team dynamics to keep us productive and unified.
29	Leading change	My manager is open to change and helps our team adapt to new situations.
30	Leading change	My manager clearly communicates the reasons for changes and supports the team through the process.

The questions in Table 2 represent the final outcome of the two authors' work, incorporating feedback from the four consulted professors and input from the colleagues with whom the items were tested. The professors' feedback addressed potential ambiguities from double-barreled questions and the use of only two questions per construct, which could affect content validity. However, to ensure a high response rate, the decision was made to keep the number of questions per construct at two (Kost & De Rosa, 2018; Sharma, 2022; Chudoba, 2024). Considering the inputs regarding double-barreled questions, the questionnaire was revised to eliminate potential ambiguities and improve the singularity and clarity of the questions. In the next phase, the improved items (1–10 and 11–30) were reordered to avoid a thematically paired sequence, as shown in Table 2, and the "skill" column was removed. The questionnaire was then circulated amongst a small group of colleagues, and two questions were posed to them for all 30 items. The first question was "Is this question clear?" and the second question was "Do you have enough first-hand information to answer this question about your manager?" It was decided to add "Not sure" as an additional option to the "Yes" and "No" responses. One colleague commented that the questions were thoughtful and well-structured, while another raised concerns about some of the original questions (11–30), suggesting that certain items needed the word "mostly", specifically highlighting questions 13 and 15. This recommendation was well-received, and "mostly" was also added to questions 24 and 25. An

adjustment was further suggested for question 20, where "people of authority" was revised to "people in senior positions." All these recommendations have been incorporated into Table 2.

The questionnaire was named the *Feedback to Improve Management Skills* (FIMS) Questionnaire to accurately reflect its purpose and function.

The papers "Developing a Manager: Conceptualising and Identifying the Elements of Management Development" by Cook and Steyn 2 (2025) and "The Role of Feedback in the Development of Managers" by Cook and Steyn (2024b) provided the vernacular for the narrative of the FIMS manual. The typologies from "The Role of Feedback in the Development of Managers" were used to structure the largest part of the manual. The manual for FIMS is provided in Annexure A: Feedback to Improve Management Skills (FIMS) Questionnaire. Provided in Annexure B is the Invitation to complete the questionnaire, Aimed at subordinates. To prepare managers and inform them that their subordinates will be assessing their skills, they must be notified about the upcoming evaluation. Annexure C: Invitation to participate in administering the questionnaire provides a sample invitation directed at managers, detailing how they should be informed about the assessment process.

6. Discussion

Drawing on Western literature on management, management development, and feedback, a concise questionnaire was developed to serve as an effective tool for assessing management skills. Foundational works by Fayol, Katz, Mintzberg, and Drucker, revealing notable commonalities, and more human-centred research outputs, particularly the overarching and comprehensive study by Whetten and Cameron (2016), informed the structure and content of the questionnaire. The structure provided by Fayol (1949) (five elements) and Whetten and Cameron (2016) (10 elements) was replicated in the questionnaire, providing it with an anchor for content validity. Though the items of the questionnaire were largely the result of an intuitive process of the first author, several rounds of discussions followed before the first draft of the questionnaire was finalised. Incorporating the feedback of experts in this field, as well as feedback from colleagues, including individuals who do not come from predominantly Western backgrounds, contributed to the content and face validity of the questionnaire. The questions were carefully designed to have high content and face validity, and it is believed that this was achieved by describing the development process in detail.

The questionnaire is accompanied by a manual (Annexure A), which explains how it should be used. Additionally, instructions to respondents (Annexure B) and an introduction to the questionnaire for managers being assessed (Annexure C) are provided. The meticulous process used in the development of the questionnaire and the use of information on management development and feedback within the workplace contribute to the usefulness of FIMS as an assessment tool, which provides managers with feedback on their skills. It is believed that the questions are to the point and that subordinates may feel they provide real feedback to their managers (with the hope that providing the feedback will increase managers' self-awareness and open up the possibility for them to reconsider the manner in which they perform their roles). It is thus believed that the mere administration of FIMS may prime managers to alter their behaviour.

7. Conclusion

The outcome of this research is a ready-to-use, off-the-shelf measurement of managerial skills in the form of a questionnaire that will be reported on by subordinates. The instrument can be used to diagnose managerial inefficiencies, assess the impact of managerial development interventions, and serve as a management development tool on its own, administered multiple times without being costly or disruptive to the workforce. Additionally, because FIMS does not take managers out of their workplace, it can be applied across an organisation with ease, allowing all managers to be evaluated, receive feedback, and be developed simultaneously.

By using a comprehensive body of literature, feedback from experts in the field of management development and colleagues in professional practice, a comprehensive management skills feedback instrument, which could be applied to assess or develop managers, was developed and is now available to users as a management skills assessment tool or even as a development intervention. The use of FIMS requires minimal resources and could even be used as an alternative management development intervention.

Though FIMS has content and face validity, no construct or predictive validity information is available. Given that only qualitative evidence is currently available, the instrument should be used primarily in low-risk contexts, such as student leadership development or exploratory research, rather than for high-stakes decisions like employee evaluation or disciplinary action, as such applications may be inappropriate and potentially misleading without robust quantitative validation. Research on the validity, as well as the reliability of FIMS, is needed. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to use the instrument, which is available from the second author of this article (also in an electronic version). The instrument could be used as a one-off assessment to alert managers regarding their current performance in their tasks or roles. However, it could also be employed regularly to provide ongoing feedback, helping managers stay informed about their performance levels. This continuous feedback would reinforce the expectation of certain behaviours, encouraging managers to engage more frequently in the behaviour required of them.

8. Declarations

Data Availability: This review is based entirely on publicly available data and information sourced from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and other academic publications cited in the manuscript. No new primary data were generated or analysed during this study. Readers may refer to the cited sources for detailed information.

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