



# The Role of Contextual Antecedents in Dialogic Feedback

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore which contextual antecedents play a role in the feedback dialogue by employees. Two research questions are answered. First, to what extent do employees engage in a feedback dialogue? Second, what are the contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback? This study referred to the vast amount of research in feedback seeking behaviour and its contextual antecedents and questions the extent to which findings in this strand of research apply to dialogic feedback. The study was conducted in a new secondary school. The critical incident technique was used. Interviews were held with 15 employees (coordinator and teaching staff). The results of the study showed that feedback dialogue occurred in eight critical incidents. The relevance of seven contextual antecedents of feedback dialogue was shown: uncertainty, work pressure, target-related antecedents, structural antecedents, leadership styles, organizational culture and climate and relational antecedents. Based on the findings, we suggest practical implications and avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** Dialogic feedback; Feedback seeking behaviour; Contextual antecedent's dialogic feedback

## Introduction

Innovation is high on the agenda of many schools all over the world. Technological advancements are one example of changes in society that have a large impact on learning and instruction in schools [1,2]. In addition, changes in national and regional legislation concerning education pose challenges to school to revise their way of working or their programs. Ample studies have been conducted on the issue of educational innovation and the challenges that arise [3,4]. The importance of professional development in times of change is a well-studied research domain. For an innovation to be sustainable, it is of utmost importance that it is implemented in such a way that it becomes 'a natural part of teachers' repertoire of teaching skills' [5]. Therefore, professional development with

continued follow-up and support is essential, with collaborative professional dialogue and practice as cornerstones for change (King, 2014). In this respect, Greany, and Maxwell [6] argue that teachers learning together is important "partly because reciprocal vulnerability can speed up risk taking" (p.15). More specifically, in this learning together journey, feedback plays a vital role. As Darling-Hammond, Hylar and Garner [7] write "Professional development models associated with gains in student learning frequently provide built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection. While feedback and reflection are two distinct practices, they work together to help teachers move thoughtfully

toward the expert visions of practice that they may have learned about or seen modelled during PD.” (p. 14) Reviewing 35 studies, they observed that in 24 studies, processes were described for providing teachers with feedback on their practice. The purpose of this feedback is to help the teacher recognize his strengths and points for improvement and in this way support him to find the steps to take in his competence development. Feedback acts as the engine of the professional learning process.

It is surprising that, although learning together and feedback are often indicated as a crucial element of any CPF program, feedback is mainly positioned as the act of giving information on one’s functioning. Feedback is mainly described as the communication of information by an external source (peers, supervisor, parents, ...) about one or more aspect(s) of the teacher (as a learner) functioning, his approach to teaching and learning, with the aim of changing (meta)cognition, motivation and/or the teacher’s behaviour and thus optimizing student learning outcomes [8]. In contrast to most educational feedback literature, in organizational literature, many authors have emphasized and evidenced that feedback is a process, with the act of feedback seeking as a very important first step in the feedback process [9]. In the context of innovation in organizations, it is argued that the collectively of employees should be seen as a means and a strength for future-proofing organizations, but the organization should gain insights into probabilities to stimulate this collaborative development by supporting feedback processes. Several studies show that feedback is a tool that helps to verify more clarity about the values, norms and working method within an organization [10,11]. Through an actual dialogue about feedback, it is feasible to ask for clarification, get acquainted with shared insight, react to others, and ask follow-up questions [12,13]. This phenomenon is known as feedback dialogue or dialogic feedback.

In studying the feedback process, research in the domain of organizational studies mainly addresses feedback-seeking with a focus on one member of the feedback dyad. Those studies investigate the reasons and ways of asking for feedback, not considering the interaction between both feedback members, the seeker, and the giver. However, both employees are crucial in the feedback dyadic relationship [14]. Organizations are slowly realizing this and increasing their HR practices concerning continuous and frequent feedback by exchanging ideas, insights, and opinions [15]. This aligns with the focus on dialogue in the emerging sustainable Human Resource management literature [16].

Despite the increasing attention to dialogue as a relevant HR practice, engaging in feedback dialogue costs time and energy, which is scarce. Therefore, for organizations it is crucial to find out what could contribute and what is necessary to use the tool of feedback dialogue to share the vision, values, norms, and best practices with each other to contribute to the employees’ competence development.

In the last twenty years, feedback seeking and feedback giving as two parts of the feedback process have gained a lot of attention [17]. However, feedback as a dialogue is more than the

mere sum of seeking and giving. Engaging in a feedback dialogue is about interaction, it entails a dyadic relationship with relational dependence and behavioural reciprocity between seeker and giver [18]. Using the concept of dialogue, refers to “an intentional, conscious, and deliberate activity in which prescribed, rational, content-driven, and problem focused goals are explored through procedures of dialogue, often guided by facilitators. The interaction of interlocutors converges around a given problem” [16].

Despite the arguments for the value of engaging in a feedback dialogue, research is still limited [8]. Tam [19] argued that a broader view of new and unexplored themes such as components, conditions and contextual circumstances that enter the feedback dialogue is essential to map an all-encompassing picture. More precisely, studies should examine behavioural reciprocity, concentrating on the feedback seeker and giver interaction. On that behalf, valuable research can be done on the feedback dialogue characteristics and its process perspective. Consequently, this study has the following research aim: Unravel which contextual antecedents contribute to feedback dialogue to work towards collaborative development.

This research aims to broaden the theoretical understanding of feedback dialogue and provides insights into the influencing contextual antecedents. The research setting is a recently started innovative secondary school in Belgium.

## Feedback as a Dialogue

Feedback research has a long tradition. Previous feedback articles have focused, with a few exceptions, on three facets: feedback-seeking, feedback giving, and the reaction of the feedback recipient [9,17,18,20]. The foundation of feedback literature was laid by Ashford and Cummings [21], who explicitly focused on feedback-seeking. This study argued that individuals should not passively wait to receive feedback but should actively seek feedback using diverse strategies. Research has been developing from feedback seeking in the context of once-a-year performance with a supervisor to proactively feedback-seeking from peers [22]. Growing research on this topic tried to answer questions on motives, approaches to acquire self-relevant information and timing to ask for feedback [23]. Next, as part of the feedback seeking research, the feedback-giving process is studied, addressing the circumstances where feedback givers make cognitive attributions after seeking feedback [24]. Finally, studies addressed the recipients’ reaction to the given feedback, which can differ among individuals, even if the feedback content is the same [20]. Research distinguishes cognitive [25] and affective [26] responses and the profoundness of processing of input received [27].

Although characteristics such as feedback seeking and feedback giving have been extensively researched, little initiative has been shown to investigate the associated patterns of feedback giving behaviour and feedback seeking behaviour and the other way around [9]. Anseel and Brutus [18] first investigated the interaction between these characteristics and called it feedback dialogue. Their research provided new insights, showing that the searcher’s feedback search strategies are the beginning of a feedback dialogue.

Consequently, the feedback behaviour activates the feedback giver and, subsequently, the response of the feedback receiver [9,18]. Furthermore, the few studies on feedback dialogue discussed the key antecedents of an appropriate feedback dialogue environment: behavioural reciprocity and relational dependency. The reciprocal interaction that connects feedback seeking and giver behaviour is called behavioural reciprocity [18]. In most cases, the feedback search process is focused on an individual in the feedback dialogue dyad. However, because the focus is mainly on how and why an individual would seek or give feedback, there has been little focus on the interaction between the participants within a feedback dialogue [8].

Relational dependence is crucial to creating interaction in feedback dialogue. This concept emphasizes the quality of the feedback seeker and giver relationship [18]. Because the feedback seeker and giver depend on each other during the interaction, this must be a point of attention during the feedback process [17].

Feedback dialogue supports people asking questions, enlightening their shared understandings, reacting to each other's ideas, and seeking clarification [12,13]. By talking to each other, employees are heard, opinions are exchanged, concrete information is discussed, and interpretations and expectations are explained. Through this way of communicating, different perceptions of the feedback process are harmonized [12]. However, behavioural reciprocity and relational dependence research are limited in the feedback literature [18].

### A feedback dialogue model

Dialogic feedback is a dyadic construct in which exchanges and interactions occur between two or more individuals [18]. Integrating findings from feedback seeking and feedback giving research Dochy, Segers and Artikan [8] developed a model of the cyclical dialogic feedback process (Figure 1).

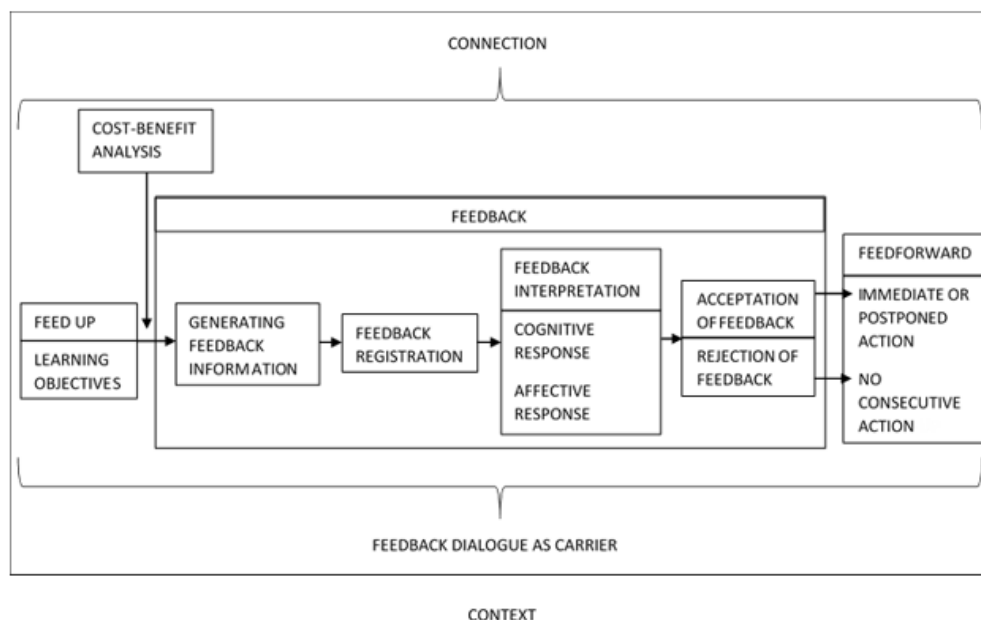


Figure 1: Model of the Cyclical Dialogic Feedback Process [8].

The feedback process starts with a feed up phase in which the employee sets a goal. To achieve this goal, s/he seeks feedback via inquiry or monitoring, two feedback seeking strategies. Whether s/he seeks feedback depends on the result of a cost-benefit analysis [9]. S/he reflects on the question of whether the effort s/he must invest in generating feedback is in balance with the expected benefits. The answer to this question is related to the employees' motives to seek feedback. For example, if seeking feedback is expected to harm his or her reputation and this expected negative consequence is perceived as more important than generating tips

for improving his consecution of a certain task, the employee will probably choose not to seek feedback. However, if s/he expects more to win than to lose, the employee will be inclined to seek feedback. This is where the feedback phase starts. The employee explicitly asks for feedback or retrieves data with a feedback value (e.g., the dashboard in a learning management system that shows the percentage of the learning track that you have completed). This feedback seeking strategy is called inquiry. S/he may also seek feedback by observing the reactions of relevant others to his behaviour or performance, such as a supervisor or a colleague.

However, this strategy of seeking feedback, monitoring, might lead to inaccurate information due to the large room for interpretation. Next, the employee registers the generated feedback, records this feedback, and starts to interpret it. Cognitive interpretation refers to evaluating the value of feedback in terms of contributing to his/her goals. The affective reaction to the feedback generated implies the emotions evoked by the feedback generated, or is the feedback experienced as stimulating and supportive or rather as demotivating and hindering. Depending on the interpretation of the feedback, the employee accepts, ignores, or rejects it. In case s/he accepts the feedback, s/he determines the next steps for immediate or later action. This is called the feedforward step. From here the feedback process can start again, based on the new goals set during the feedforward step.

The carrier of all the steps in this feedback process is dialogue. From the feed up phase in which the employee sets his/her goals

to determining the following steps in the feedback process, it is the dialogue with relevant others such as a coach, peers, or a supervisor that each step leads to accurate and complete information. However, dialogic feedback does not just happen. Certain conditions are vital to make it happen. The contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback are described below and are the topic of interest in this article.

### Contextual Antecedents

To date, there are hardly any insights on the context needed for employees to engage in a feedback dialogue. However, in the research domain of feedback seeking, ample studies examined feedback seeking's contextual antecedents [28]. Eight different antecedents have been identified: the uncertainty context, work pressure, target-related antecedents, structural antecedents, leadership styles, organizational culture and climate, relational antecedents, and cultural antecedents. In table 1 we summarize the antecedents of feedback seeking and their indicators.

**Table 1:** Antecedents of Feedback Seeking and their Indicators.

Antecedents	Indicators
Uncertainty	Role ambiguity
	Contingency ambiguity
	Strategic ambiguity
Work pressure	Time
	Workload
	Stress
Target-related antecedents	Feedback quality
	Availability of feedback
	Perceived trustworthiness
	Credibility
Structural antecedents	Self-control systems
	Organizational support
	Job characteristics: autonomy, skill variety, task identification, task interdependency
Leadership styles	Transformational Leadership
	Supportive Leadership
	Authentic Leadership
Organizational culture and climate	Supportive learning climate
Relational antecedents	Quality of the interpersonal relationships
	Psychological safety
Cultural antecedent	Nationality, ethnicity
	Cultural differences

The first contextual antecedent is uncertainty. Walsh et al. [29] argued that the context of uncertainty might block or benefit individuals from seeking feedback. Multiple studies have suggested that uncertainty can drive feedback seeking behaviour because rising feelings of uncertainty can improve feedback value. One indicator of uncertainty is role ambiguity. In organizational life, many job roles are defined so ambiguously that uncertainty is

generated [21]. The specific uncertainties associated with role ambiguity are characterised by the responsibilities associated with the job, the ability to perform the job, and the related unwritten rules that should govern the job's behaviour [21,30]. Among the individuals in question, there is a perceived lack of information about supervisor evaluations of their work and the associated expectations, promotion opportunities, and job responsibility [10].

This role uncertainty can create employee tension or anxiety (Van Sell et al., 1981). Feedback dialogue is a suitable means to deal with this uncertainty as an organization. Seeking feedback that provides helpful information to reduce ambiguity is a way to deal with the anxiety generated by role ambiguity [21]. However, research findings on the role of role ambiguity and feedback seeking are not consistent. For example, in his meta-analysis, Anseel et al. [9] reported an insignificant relationship between role ambiguity and feedback seeking.

Besides role ambiguity, uncertainty is related to the contingency between achieving secondary organizational rewards (i.e., promotions) and work performance [21,30]. Ashford [30] suggests that feedback helps to understand a new context by identifying evaluative contingencies. In this way, successful adjustments can be made by both the individual and the organization. In addition to individual uncertainties, job, role, or task-related, organizational uncertainties are also due to changes in organizational structure and culture [31]. This type of uncertainty is called strategic uncertainty and refers to uncertainty about issues at the organizational level. For example, previous research into the uncertainty of a newly formed business showed that employees were uncertain about future viability [32].

A second contextual antecedent concerns work pressure. Carayon & Zijlstra [33] define work pressure as “the perception of high job demands that never seem to diminish, that involve tight deadlines and that people have a tough time in keeping up with” (p. 33). van der Rijt et al. [34] showed that the relationship between work pressure and feedback seeking follows an inverted U-shape. Related to work pressure, time is seen as a condition for feedback-seeking [35]. As Sijbom, et al. [36]. argue: “optimally benefiting from a variety of feedback perspectives requires that employees have ample time available to explore the different insights articulated by feedback sources, conceptually combine these different perspectives, and integrate it into their reconfigured ideas. Such cognitive elaboration of diverse feedback information requires sufficient time for processing feedback.” (p.358). In this respect, stress is often suggested as affecting the act of seeking feedback. Even when employees see an instrumental value in seeking feedback, the perceived image cost might act as a barrier. In stressful situations, caring about the negative consequences of seeking feedback hinders employees from seeking feedback [37].

Thirdly, target-related antecedents are identified. Target-related antecedents of feedback seeking behaviour concern the availability of feedback, feedback quality, and the perceived trustworthiness of the feedback generated. With respect to the availability of feedback, in their review study, Ashford, et al. [23] indicate that the unavailability of feedback sources blocks or thwart employees' attempts to seek feedback. However, in their 2016 review study, Ashford et al state that “the relationship between the availability of feedback in the job and feedback seeking was less straightforward than hypothesized. Contrary to his hypothesis, Krasman [38] found that having a job in which feedback was inherent to the job itself or was available from others did not reduce the level of feedback seeking.” (p. 223). Next to the availability, the quality of feedback is

identified as a contextual antecedent of feedback seeking. Feedback quality refers to the type of information generated, its orientation (positive or negative), and the powerfulness of the feedback [39]. A difference is made between constructive and destructive feedback [40]. Constructive feedback is described as giving feedback about concrete information that provides clarity and is provided easily. The purpose of the feedback is to improve, continue to encourage or correct behaviour [40]. With respect to the powerfulness, the feedback generated is of more value and therefore more constructive if it provides information at the task level on a personal level [40,41]. In contrast, destructive feedback is generalised performance feedback. Furthermore, poor performance is assigned to internal factors rather than situational factors. Finally, destructive feedback is reported as potentially threatening and inconsiderate to the feedback seeker [40]. Finally, multiple reports reveal that the process of seeking feedback is affected by the type and level of trust [42-44]. Various researchers have shown that employees are more likely to ask for feedback if they have a trusting relationship with their supervisors, defined as affect-based trust. For example, Chuang et al. [43] and Huang [42] discovered that more negative feedback was asked by individuals when they trusted their coordinator. Elaborating on the types of trust, the study by Lu et al. [44] showed that the value and frequency of the feedback obtained were more prominent with a high perceived expert power (where cognitive trust is from the employee). This resulted in an increase in willingness to receive negative feedback from their supervisors. This description is defined as cognition-based trust. Finally, Ashford et al [22] refer to the role of the credibility of the feedback source. They state: “Anseel et al. (2013) found no significant relationship between supervisor credibility and overall feedback seeking. However, when we examined their results for feedback inquiry and monitoring separately, we observed that credibility is positively related to feedback inquiry, but not to feedback monitoring. This pattern suggests that individuals may monitor feedback more indiscriminately but may use the credibility of the target as a selection criterion to decide whether to inquire for feedback from the target” (p. 220).

Fourth, Ashford et al. [22] refer to antecedents related to the structural context of feedback seeking behaviour referring to employees' jobs characteristics and the broader organizational structure. According to these authors, this relationship is still underdeveloped in literature. With respect to job characteristics, they refer to the study of Krasman [38]. He indicated that high levels of task identification and job autonomy are positively related to feedback seeking. On the contrary skill variety and task significance are not related to engaging in feedback seeking. Kim et al. [45] stated that the level of autonomy in the workplace is crucial to transforming the learned knowledge from seeking feedback to higher performance. In an environment with little task autonomy, the benefits may not have focused on feedback seeking, compared to an environment where the seeker has the autonomy to act on it. An organization can capitalize on the frequency and quality of feedback by deploying performers to give them the autonomy to respond to the feedback they receive [45]. In addition, De Stobbeir & Ashford [46] found that employees who perceived their tasks



to be interdependent with those of their coworkers tended to seek more feedback from their coworkers, especially when they perceived their environment as psychologically safe.

With respect to organizational characteristics, Ashford et al [22] refer in their review study to Krasman [47] who showed a positive relation between standardization, formalization, hierarchy, and feedback seeking. However, no relation was found between routine, employment involvement in decision making and feedback seeking. Tsui & Ashford [48] argued that self-control systems enable feedback seeking, allowing performers to estimate how consistent their behaviour is with supervisors' set norms, formal procedures, and expectations. Individuals align their self-control systems to the more extensive organizational management procedures.

Fifth, leadership style has been evidenced as playing a role in feedback seeking behaviour. Based on a literature review, Ashford, Blatt and VandeWalle [23] confirm the role of the supervisor in stimulating or hindering subordinates in seeking feedback. Moreover, feedback seeking appears to be influenced by transformational leadership [9]. Transformational leaders propagate a vision in an inspiring way, thereby impacting employees [49]. However, due to the increasing criticism of the transformational leadership construct [50], the research has expanded by comparing feedback-seeking with alternative conceptualizations of leadership. A transformational leadership style is recommended when an organization is in a start-up or scale-up phase and is looking for a new leader [51]. The reason for this is the turbulence and uncertainty before the organization is in a stable phase. Hinkin and Tracey [51] argue that this leadership style is effective during challenging stages. Teunissen et al. [52] indicated that the increase in the perceived value of seeking feedback and decrease in perceived costs is driven by a supportive leader; someone who is approachable, considers the needs of subordinates, and is friendly. On the other hand, Miller & Levy [53] argue that a negative environment is created precisely when there is an unsupportive leader who reacts punitively to poor employee performance. Accordingly, this makes subordinates prefer to avoid future feedback encounters, as there may be less communication, interaction, and support, making them feel psychologically distant from their supervisors [54]. Furthermore, the studies by Gardner et al., [55] and Qian et al. [56] imply that followers will seek feedback from authentic leaders because of feedback quality and the low effort costs. Authentic leaders boost the perceived value of seeking feedback but reduce perceived image costs [56].

Sixth, organizational culture and climate are seen as relevant contextual antecedents of feedback seeking behaviour. Several authors have argued on the positive influence of a supportive environment on feedback seeking. For example, Ashford and Northcraft (1992) found that an organization's culture and manipulated norms affect the inquiry for feedback. Later, Ashford et al [23] confirmed that when stopping to ask for feedback is considered a sign of strength (as found by Ashford & Northcraft, 1992) [57], this will lead to less feedback seeking behavior. They argue that the costs of seeking feedback are both socially constructed and socially

affected. An organization's culture can make "inquiry for feedback more or less acceptable, thereby affecting the extent of image costs associated with it" (p. 784).

Seventh, relational antecedents of feedback seeking behaviour are described in literature. Feedback seeking implies that seeker and giver interact with each other. Therefore, relational considerations might play a role in accepting and applying the feedback generated [58]. In this respect, as a conclusion of their meta-analysis Anseel et al, (2013) state that the association between high-quality relationships and feedback seeking behaviour is robust. This is specifically tested in the setting of employees seeking feedback from their supervisor. In addition, Ashford et al (2006) stress the importance of positive peer relations for engaging in feedback seeking. A relationship form in which mutual trust, mutual emotional support and attachment, and self-disclosure occur through significant exchanges on both work-related and personal topics [59,60]. This type of relationship establishes trust, safety, and disclosure. In addition, this allows for the exchange of personal feedback. In the same vein, in 2020, De Stobeleir, et al. found that employees seek more peer feedback when they perceive their working environment as psychologically safe. Psychological safety is expressed as the belief that mistakes and problems can be discussed without being used against the individual [61-63].

Eighth, cultural antecedents of feedback seeking behaviour have been studied. Ashford and Tsui [57] notice that when there are more demographically various individuals, the learning impact through feedback seeking increases. In addition, various studies have been addressing differences in feedback seeking behaviour, for example between American and Hong Kong employees [11], between Chinese Canadians and Euro-Canadians [64]. The findings show differences in self-assertiveness [11] and differences in feedback seeking motives [64] accounting for the differences in feedback seeking behaviour across these groups. Finally, Barner-Rasmussen [65] found that when the feedback seeker was from one country and the target from another, more feedback was sought. He concluded that differences in nationality might make the feedback more useful. Ashford et al. [22] argue for more research into the impact of deeply rooted culturally determined psychological factors on feedback seeking behaviour. They refer to the study of Brutus & Greguras [66] which showed that individuals who value being independent (i.e., an independent self-construal) were more likely to be motivated to gain status. In turn, this was related to their feedback seeking behaviour.

## Aim and Research Questions

Although research on dialogic feedback is increasing, to date, hardly any evidence is available on its contextual antecedents. Therefore, this study explores the contextual antecedents which play a role in the feedback dialogue by investigating the following research aim and sub-questions. Our core research aim is to unravel which contextual antecedents contribute to engagement in a feedback dialogue.

We formulated two research research questions.

RQ1: To what extent do employees engage in a feedback dialogue by taking the different steps of the dialogic feedback process?

RQ2: What are the contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback?

## Methodology

### Approach

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore complex concepts and relationships to understand the phenomenon [67]. A qualitative approach makes it possible to gain insight into people's interpretations, experiences, and people's understanding [68]. Asking explorative questions is crucial when researching a relatively new and complex concept, such as feedback dialogue.

The critical incident technique is used giving structure to answering the main question through semi-structured interviews [69]. Within semi-structured interviews, the critical incident method makes it possible to gather the data through the frame of reference for the interviewee [70]. The critical incidents technique allows participants to explain specific situations and get an idea of how they deal with experiences and their perceptions. In addition, the experience of participants also provides a global picture of the context of the feedback dialogue environment.

Semi-structured interviews allow in-depth insights into the complex issues relevant to the research questions [68]. Furthermore, the qualitative semi-structured approach is suitable for capturing actual data and the ability to answer "how" research questions [71]. More specifically, it allows exploring specific topics and aspects related to the research questions [72], while it permits flexible follow-up questions based on the interviewee's verbal expressions on previously asked questions [73]. If a participant did not touch upon an intended area of interest in their answer, supplementary questions might be asked [74]. Finally, semi-structured still allowed comparison compared to unstructured interviews, which is key to this research [68,75].

### Setting

This study was conducted in a new secondary school in Belgium. The school was founded in 2019 and developed an innovative approach to learning and teaching. Two new locations opened during the next three years. During the data collection period, the school had around 252 pupils and thirty employees. The three school locations have developed and implemented various initiatives to develop a shared vision and strategy and to align the learning and instruction approaches in the three locations. Formally, there are regular one-on-one meetings of teaching staff with the coordinator of the location, intervention once a week, the opportunity to schedule moments with peers that have subject-related jobs and the opportunity to visit other locations. On the school level, there are regular meetings of the three coordinators. This setting is optimal to study feedback dialogue as former scholars in the domain of feedback argued that in the context of innovation the collectively of employees should be seen as a means and a strength for future-proofing organizations, but the organization should gain insights

into probabilities to stimulate this collaborative development by supporting feedback processes. Several studies show that feedback is a tool that helps to verify more clarity about the values, norms and working method within an organization [10,11]. Through an actual dialogue about feedback, it is feasible to ask for clarification, get acquainted with shared insight, react to others, and ask follow-up questions [12,13].

### Sample

The proper sample size of qualitative research was determined when the collected information was saturated because it was not easily estimated beforehand [76]. This resulted in interviewing 15 (+/-50%) of the 30 employees. Before participating in the interviews, the coordinator and the principal researcher contacted the employees via email to ask for their participation and proposed a scheduling tool to plan the interviews. Their participation was voluntary. All fifteen employees have conveyed critical incidents that contain dialogues during a formal or informal intervention. Concerning the gender of the employees, the distribution was nearly even: 8 (53%) female and 7 (47%) male participants. In terms of work units, within location 1, 39% were interviewed (7/18), location two was 50% (6/12), and location 3 was 50% (2/4). The employees functioned as coordinators or teachers (having different roles as a teacher such as student coach or subject expert) allowing for heterogeneity in their professional expertise and gaining insights from diverse perspectives. The interviewed employees' service length varied from almost one school year to two years. The school name and participants' name and demographic information were anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

### Data collection and procedure

Thirteen interviews were conducted via Zoom and two via face-to-face. The interview duration varied from 45 to 60 minutes. All participants from all locations received an invitation, and fifteen employees reacted positively. Before the employees participated in the interviews, they were informed about the study's purpose. The form shared with them included information about the interview duration and the opportunity to ask questions. Furthermore, it mentioned anonymity to limit socially desirable answers. We used a systematized approach for conducting interviews to enhance the data collection reliability. For example, each interview started similarly, and an interview guideline was used. In addition, employees were asked to think about critical incidents before attending the interview. This enabled the participant to think about relevant incidents before starting the interview and to avoid participants not be able to recall critical incidents during the interview. Finally, we asked each interviewee for written consent for audiotaping the interview. The interviews were guided by only one researcher who neutrally asked the questions to prevent external values and responses influencing the outcome of the interviews (i.e., interviewer bias).

The interview guideline consisted of eleven questions to structure the interviews. In addition, the interview guide also included several follow-up questions. The guideline consisted of six sections: general questions, the critical incident, feedback seeking

behaviour, feedback giving behaviour, the response of the feedback recipient, relation quality giver-seeker, and feedback dialogue. First, the interviewer gave insight into the interview's purpose. Afterwards, general and demographic questions were asked (including position, duties, and seniority in the organization), and participants were invited to explain what learning from colleagues means for them individually. These questions helped break the ice and gave insights into the learning climate. The third part concentrated on the first critical incident interviewees wanted to share by recalling an experience in which they had a feedback conversation. During the entire interview, two times, the interviewer asked about a situation where it was successful and a situation where it was not possible to talk to a colleague or coordinator about feedback. The following question was posed to collect the critical incidents; 'Think of a recent moment when you had a conversation with a colleague or coordinator when you were unsure whether you had made the right decision, handled something correctly, or done the right things at the right time?' These incidents had to be precise and contain information about the response of both the feedback giver and seeker.

Within the fourth section, interviewees were asked to explain their feedback seeking behaviour through two open-ended questions (e.g., "Why did you seek this colleague's opinion?" and "In what way did you approach this colleague?"). Next, the feedback giving behaviour was determined by asking a direct question (e.g., "Did you find the opinion of this colleague or coordinator valuable?"). Similarly, an open-ended question was used to identify the sixth section for the response of the feedback recipient (e.g., "How did you react and feel during this conversation?"). Accordingly, multiple questions were connected to the quality of the relationship between the feedback seeker and feedback giver (e.g., "Why did you turn to me? Why did you turn to exactly this person? And what is your relationship?"). Itinally, the last section aimed to find out what an organization can do to make it easy for interviewees to engage in dialogue. A pilot interview was first conducted with an external participant and reviewed by an expert in feedback dialogue to ensure clear and in-depth questions.

## Coding

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the collected data were analysed employing thematic analysis [77]. Boyatzis [78] describes thematic analysis as an approach to the process of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns through which interpretations from different perspectives can be made. It is a method that provides a theoretically flexible approach that allows qualitative data to be analysed [77].

To analyse the data, we developed a codebook. Based on contextual antecedents of feedback-seeking and feedback dialogue (see table 1), we identified eight themes (Uncertainty context, Work Pressure, Target-related antecedents, Structural antecedents, Leadership styles, Organizational culture and climate, Relational antecedents, and Cultural antecedent) with their related codes. One up to four codes and subcodes were related to each theme. In

addition, the different steps in feedback dialogue were also coded to provide clarity in the feedback dialogue process (Feedback seeking, feedback giving and response of the feedback recipient). Finally, the characteristics of feedback dialogue were coded, indicating the feedback source (colleague and/or coordinator) and the quality of feedback (constructive or destructive).

Subsequently, the Atlas.ti software system was used to encode the transcripts of interviews. All interviews were uploaded for this purpose, meaningful units were identified (sentences, chunks, or single words) and coded based on the codebook.

To check interrater reliability, a second coder coded 10% of the meaningful units. The second coder was trained how to use the codebook. After a first round of coding by both coders, interrater reliability was calculated. The Cohen's Kappa indicating the interrater reliability was  $\kappa = .58$ . However, the commonly applied criterion is 0.70, so this score was insufficient. Accordingly, the two coders examined and discussed the dissimilarities in coding during a moderation meeting. After modification of the codebook, Cohen's Kappa was 0.71.

In addition to a descriptive analysis (frequency of each code), we also conducted a co-concurrence analysis. The results of this analysis show the number of times two codes co-occur in a meaningful unit. In addition, the c-coefficient is calculated, an indicator of the strength of the relationship between the pair of codes [79]. The value of the c-coefficient ranges between 0 (indicating perfect independence) and 1 (indicating perfect relation). To paint a clear picture of the most closely related coding, a cut-off points of  $c = 0.05$  has been chosen. For interpretation of the c-coefficient different c-values are compared with each other [80].

## Results

To what extent do employees engage in a feedback dialogue by taking the different steps of the dialogic feedback process?

There were different types of dialogue observed. Accordingly, a difference was made in feedback dialogue, information-seeking conversations, and help-seeking conversations. Help-seeking was involved in six cases by five participants. In these situations, help was mainly requested in handling conversations or guiding children. In addition, information-seeking was involved in the critical incidents recalled by eight participants This mainly involved requesting information about how to deal with situations with parents or children and discussing points about the structural functioning of the organization. As this study focuses on feedback dialogue, only the critical incidents describing 'interaction', i.e., seeking feedback by the interviewee, a feedback source that responds (colleague or supervisor/coordinator) and a response to this from the feedback seeker, were considered. As a result, within Table 2, it is shown that nine situations (seven participants) were counted that represent a feedback dialogue. A participant who engaged in a feedback dialogue described the situation as follows:



**Table 2:** Frequency of type of dialogue.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
feedback dialogue	7	47%	9	36%
Information seeking	8	53%	9	32%
Help-seeking	5	33%	6	32%

“Uhm, we have evaluations of the children at regular times and evaluation moments. And linked to a triangular conversation or linked to an uhm yes, kind of report I’ll just call it an evaluation report. I had written [the format for] that evaluation report. This should also be real written feedback twice a year. uhm. Oh, what I really wasn’t sure about is maybe this is the right way of phrasing? Or is it uhm. Yes, but from my point of view, of course, from my point of view. But is that correct? I was convinced of what I’m writing, I really want to have said it, but then I’ll have it checked. Uhm, in this

case, to our care coordinator. Sometimes a colleague can also be there, but in this case, it was a specific case” (Participant 11).

In all critical incidents where a participant engaged in a feedback dialogue, the steps question, answer, and reaction were involved except for one situation. A participant wanted to get feedback, but experts from other locations could not meet him/her to provide feedback to the participant. Except for this situation, all feedback givers were open to providing feedback (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Frequency of the three crucial feedback dialogue steps.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Feedback seeking behaviour	7	47%	9	36%
Feedback giving behaviour	7	47%	8	32%
Response feedback recipient	7	47%	8	32%

When looking at how or where employees were searching for feedback, differences can be noted. For example, it happened four times spontaneously in the corridors or the same room where feedback was briefly requested, twice in the coaching group, once in a pre-scheduled performance interview, and twice weekly with the coordinator.

With respect to why feedback was generated (motives), an instrumental motive is found in almost all cases, expressing the need to use feedback to achieve valued goals, especially in dealing with students. One participant named the image-related motive, asking for little feedback to protect the self-image.

Finally, interviewees reported examples of feedback inquiry in their critical incidents, they did not refer to feedback seeking by monitoring.

Given we focus in this study on feedback dialogue, the description of the contextual antecedents below will only be based on the 8 critical incidents describing a feedback dialogue.

With respect to the sign of the feedback dialogue, in all eight feedback dialogues the interviewees indicated they perceived them as constructive.

The feedback dialogue took place in six critical incidents with a coordinator and once with a colleague. Finally, one feedback dialogue occurred in a structural conversation with all colleagues.

Various reasons are mentioned for not being able to have a conversation with a colleague or coordinator when one was in doubt about his/her performance. For example, personality, preferring

to solve it yourself, organization structure, cancellations, layering, work pressure, caution, and uncertainty. In addition, situations are also mentioned where one describes a situation in which s/he wanted to give feedback and was unable to due to personality or little space in the conversation to explain the feedback.

What are the contextual antecedents of feedback dialogue?

The eight contextual antecedents derived from literature were found in the data.

### Uncertainty context

Many feedback dialogues were about uncertainty related to the vision of the school (strategic uncertainty: 67% of the participants; 49% of the statements). Employees wanted to know whether their performance aligns with the vision and check this with the coordinators. Some employees missed thinking ahead with colleagues and pioneering vision-wise through discussions as this would help them to better perform. However, they experienced that the vision mainly was developed by the main coordinators and decision-making council, which created a threshold for discussing it, and sometimes, they perceived a lack of clarity. As a result, structural solutions were sometimes not found. However, the newness of the organization triggered a need to start conversations. There was no answer yet, and nothing was correct yet. That was why it was easier for employees to say I do not know yet, because nobody knows.

“Uncertainty is worth mentioning. It should not be hidden or anything. Nor is an answer always necessary. Sometimes it is just

like that. Just being able to say it to each other is also okay. I think for the rest, we just must link it to the vision. That is very important, just do it. We go for our thing and our vision, and we will see where we end up. If we go for the same thing together, we will see how it works or not. That uncertainty is there in itself, and we shouldn't hide it either." (Participant 9).

Beside strategic uncertainty, eight interviewees talked about contingency uncertainty (see Table 4). In two incidents,

**Table 4:** Frequencies of the Indicators of the Antecedent Uncertainty Context.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Strategic uncertainty	10	67%	32	49%
Contingency uncertainty	8	53%	26	39%
Role ambiguity	3	20%	8	12%

Ntot=15, N1tot=66

Ntot= Total number of participants

N1tot= total (absolute) number of statements

"And that's what I've been doing from time to time but not enough. Why aren't things going well now? It could have gone a lot better already for a long time. My concern is, it must be good and it's hard to ask for help because I feel like he's doing it in the right way" (Participant 8)

Role ambiguity occurred in three interviews. In these interviews, it was mainly mentioned that it is not always clear who will take on which role after a meeting, which can lead to uncertainty. In one case, this also concerned whether the coordinator should have a substantive or process role.

"But the thing is, you are never neutral. I also have an opinion

interviewees explicitly mentioned that the employees compare themselves with employees who make noticeably confident choices or where everything seems to be going well. Also, when the coordinator is perceived as doing everything perfectly, employees could feel that they could not make mistakes. By comparing, they started to doubt their performance. Due to these factors, there was sometimes a wait-and-see attitude when asking for feedback. As a result, employees hesitated longer, which could be resolved faster.

about everything and so uhm. In that respect, I don't always find it easy, yes. uhm. Because I also really want to weigh very hard on the content. And I find that a difficult situation to stay neutral and fulfil a process role but also to express my critical opinion. Yes, because it kind of feels that way. Now, when I had that situation, I really had. I really should have taken that process role too." (Participant 13).

As depicted in Table 5, the code co-occurrence table indicates the number of times two codes co-occur and the relationship between codes using correlation coefficients (c-coefficient between brackets). Higher c- coefficients mean a stronger relationship between the codes.

**Table 5:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback and the Antecedents related to the Uncertainty Context.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Strategic uncertainty	32 (0.86)	0%		0%
Contingency uncertainty	26 (0.68)	8 (0.18)	3 (0.06)	4 (0.09)
Role ambiguity	8 (0.32)	8 (0.18)	0	0%

The co-concurrences analysis shows that strategic uncertainty had the strongest relationship with engaging in a feedback dialogue, (c-coefficient=0.86) followed by contingency uncertainty (c-coefficient= 0.68). Contingency uncertainty related to all steps of the feedback dialogue and related the strongest to the act of seeking feedback (0.18).

Contingency uncertainty can have both a positive and negative influence. For example, employees indicated that the contingency uncertainty did or did not encourage them to ask for feedback. In addition, the feedback giving behaviour and response was essential to accept the feedback and determine to act upon it or not. For example, an employee talked with a coordinator and said the

following about the feedback.

"I think that feedback certainly paid off a lot. In terms of self-assurance, from okay, the coordinator thinks I'm doing well, he is more positive than I am. So, I did gain confidence, so I definitely took that with me." (Participant 14)

### Work Pressure

All thirteen interviews reiterated that lack of time played a key role in employees' jobs (see Table 8). Many employees stated that their number of tasks was just too much for a full-time job. As one employee stated:

"I think it will always remain busy because that is how it is in a constructive or growing school." (Participant 1)

This resulted in the fact that, on the one hand, especially informal feedback moments often did not occur. On the other hand, formal moments that were planned well in advance worked better because they were fixed in the agendas. However, this mainly concerned the supervisors; employees were meeting less with each other. This was also noticeable across the locations, where calls were regularly cancelled, employees were late at meetings, or agreements were not kept. Due to the high work pressure, more structural feedback moments did not happen. This is clear in the

counts of codes for work pressure. Work pressure is coded in nine interviews, with many colleagues mentioning a busy work agenda. This sometimes makes scheduling appointments a bit difficult. A participant also stated that informal moments are lost because of work pressure. Accordingly, the work pressure can then also lead to stress. Stress is, therefore, mainly mentioned because of work pressure. As one employee stated:

"I think that work pressure is something that the school can improve in. That causes a lot of stress for people. So, from that point of view, a major exercise must be done in which the willingness to reconsider everything is in function." (Participant 10) (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Frequencies of the Indicators of the Antecedent Work Pressure.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Time	13	86%	50	64%
Workload	9	60%	23	30%
Stress	4	27%	5	6%

Ntot=15, N1tot=78

Table 7 shows that time had a very strong relation with engaging in a feedback dialogue (count= 50, c-coefficient=1.04). This applied to both employees and coordinators. Next, workload was related to engaging in a feedback dialogue (count=23, c-coefficient=0.56).

Several employees mentioned that it is sometimes difficult to start a conversation with coordinators because they are so busy. This also applied to employees:

**Table 7:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback and the Antecedents related to Work Pressure.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Time	50 (1)	3 (0.04)	0	0%
Workload	23 (0.56)	2 (0.04)	0	0%
Stress	5 (0.2)	0%	0	0%

"So, it is always all about the tjaktjaktjak (doing things at a fast pace, one thing after the other). At the same time, I find this very good about the job. Because you have a clear task. It is clearly moving forward. That happens a lot. I really like that. But that is also very clear." (Participant 8).

### Target-related antecedents

Ten out of fifteen employees have mentioned the availability of feedback (table 8). Some employees experienced it as easy to approach their coordinator, whereas others experienced that it

sometimes can be challenging to enter a feedback dialogue with the coordinator. This mainly concerned the largest location, where the number of employees is the biggest. Furthermore, coordinators' busy schedules needed to be considered in advance when scheduling meetings. The pre-planned conversations and acute problems could often be discussed, but the less acute discussion points usually disappeared. Almost all employees said that coordinators could respond well by giving qualitative feedback. An employee said the following:

**Table 8:** Frequencies of the Indicators of the Target-related Antecedents.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Feedback quality	10	67%	31	49%
Availability of feedback	10	67%	20	31%
Cognition-based trust	4	27%	7	11%

Ntot=15, N1tot=64

"She listens when you say something... She respects my opinion in this case. Uhm and adds her opinion to look to come to an equation. But she will rarely say something like wow, this is not good. And we're going to do that differently. It's mostly about respect I think that she has for who you are. Uh, and then from there to look at it by really listening and not wanting to impose her own opinion, but really looking together for how we can approach it even better." (Participant 11)

Four participants indicated that they felt coordinators had competencies that could contribute to the feedback. This mainly

concerned the expertise of coordinators and their prior knowledge of the organization's origin. Affect-based trust was also mentioned, whereby participants had a relationship with the coordinator based on trust.

Table 9 shows that the quality of the feedback had the strongest relation with the feedback dialogue, followed by the availability of feedback. With respect to the quality of feedback and how it is related to the response to feedback, a participant said: "And I can react really well, never feeling accusatory or feeling like it's not at the right time." (Participant 2).

**Table 9:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback Dialogue and the Target-related Antecedents.

	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Feedback quality	31 (0.82)	1 (0.02)	4 (0.08)	3 (0.06)
Availability of feedback	20 (0.59)	6 (0.17)	0	0
Cognition-based trust	7 (0.28)	1 (0.05)	0	0
Affect-based trust	6 (0.22)	1 (0.05)	0	0

A coordinator indicated that much thought was given to the feedback moment. The event for which someone was looking for feedback must not have been too long ago because otherwise, the moments and actions around it have already passed. The availability of feedback was therefore seen as crucial for the search for feedback, as shown in table 11 (c-coefficient=0.59). It was described that although coordinators were busy, it was easy to approach the coordinator through the low threshold and structural meetings.

The cognition-based trust and affect-based trust mainly influenced the feedback dialogue. As discussed on page 9, there were different motives for starting the conversation. Many employees indicated that the feedback value was also critical because the employees worked at such a unique school with a different approach than in conventional schools. However, this also has its tipping point. Three employees mentioned that giving feedback to coordinators could sometimes be difficult because the

organizational vision was so close to their hearts. It was indicated that a coordinator could justify the vision more easily than others because s/he was emotionally related to it.

### Structural antecedents

In all interviews, participants mentioned organizational support (see table 10). "Participants experienced structural activities". These structural activities helped to create conversation moments, such as interventions and conversations with the coordinator. Within this structure, participants felt that they could make mistakes. Eleven of the fifteen interviewees mentioned that a self-control system took place to a small or to a large extent. In the organization's environment, it was challenging for employees to link their feedback behaviour to the established standards, formal procedures, and supervisors' expectations. As a result, expected interventions such as going to other locations and asking for feedback from each other could not always take place. This was mainly due to the time constraint, said an employee.

**Table 10:** Frequencies of the Indicators of the Structural Antecedents.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Organisational characteristics				
Perceived organisational support	13	86%	57	61%
Self-control systems	11	73%	26	28%
Hierarchy	4	27%	7	7%
Job characteristics				
Skill variety	2	13%	2	2%
Autonomy	1	7%	2	2%

Ntot=15, N1tot=94



"I think the lack of time makes it very difficult. The coordinator can speak to me briefly, informally in the hallway. And I think we do that very often. Yeah, we make time when there's a talk after school. However, only the big difficulties really reach the formal meeting moments and intervision moment. So, I don't know how much time is really allocated for it. I think we must make time." (Participant 15).

In addition, six employees indicated that there was no hierarchical culture. However, two employees discussed how

this would be organized if the organization started to grow. Two participants indicated that they had difficulties in balancing tasks. However, two other participants did indicate that they experienced freedom and autonomy within the organization and experienced it as pleasant. An employee indicated that having autonomy worked within this school, however within certain limits.

Table 11 shows organizational support was the most strongly related to engaging in a feedback dialogue (count=57, c-coefficient=0.90). One participant said:

**Table 11:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback Dialogue and the Indicators of Structural Antecedents.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Organisational characteristics				
Perceived organisational support	57 (0.90)	3 (0.03)	0	2 (0.02)
Self-control system	26 (0.81)	2 (0.05)	0	0%
Hierarchy	7 (0.28)	0%	0	0%
Job characteristics				
Skill variety	2 (0.09)	1 (0.08)	0	0%
Autonomy	2 (0.09)	0%	0	0%

"And maybe also architecture, not that we built this building ourselves, or can choose what it looks like, but still in terms of layout it is easy to meet each other in the building, it is almost inevitable" (Participant 14)

In addition, it was also mentioned that feedback moments were often taking place in the coaching groups with students. This was then transferred to meetings between employees where they started a feedback dialogue. Several employees indicated that formally planning feedback moments were valuable so that time was made available in a structural way in addition to the already built-in more informal feedback moments. On the other hand, the structural moments between locations were more complicated. In the sense that the lines were much longer there, making it more difficult for conversations to take place.

### Leadership styles

As mentioned before, many employees perceived that the coordinators knew best the organization's vision. As a result, employees had questions or sought feedback about their supervisors' vision and performance instead of their peers.

For example, eight employees indicated that the coordinators create a vision, inspire, or develop a change process with the group members (transformational leadership). Three employees indicated that they felt that coordinators shared openly their ideas (authentic leadership). In addition, twelve out of fifteen employees also experienced supportive leadership, in which friendliness and help-orientation play a major role. It has been mentioned several times that there is trust between employees and the coordinator of the location. Many employees felt supported and could easily take their problems to their coordinator. Employees had the feeling that the coordinators were accessible. In most cases, this ensured a good relationship between employee and coordinator.

"Yes, I had a good feeling about that. The coordinator immediately recognized my need for it. In the sense that yes, just drop that now. It was good. I had a very good feeling that we could really discuss it there. She had not forgotten about it because she had very concrete opinions, input, and observations. Which made me feel like I grew a little and had certainty and got handles." (Participant 12) (Table 12).

**Table 12:** Frequencies of Indicators of the Antecedent Leadership styles.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Supportive leadership	12	80%	36	60%
Transformational leadership	8	53%	20	33%
Authentic leadership	3	20%	4	7%

Ntot=15, N1tot=60

Table 13 shows that the leadership styles were related to engaging in the feedback dialogue. Transformational leadership and supportive leadership were most prevalent in relation to engaging in a feedback dialogue ( $c$ -coefficient= 0.69). With respect

to transformational leadership, coordinators said they discussed the vision with employees to create opportunities for everyone to live a shared vision. This is an example of a coordinator's approach:

**Table 13:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback and the Indicators of the Antecedents Leadership Styles.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Transformational leadership	20 (0.69)	2 (0.06)	0	0%
Supportive leadership	36 (0.69)	2 (0.03)	3 (0.04)	1 (0.01)
Authentic leadership	4 (0.17)	0%	0	0%

"What we do very often is a short coaching conversation with each coach every two weeks. And this is actually the case all the time because we've also discussed things that are decided and that, in someone else's eyes, should have gone differently. I constantly ask these questions: What do you need, and what could be done better for you? These questions are presented to them every time. For example, what is a pitfall, especially when a school grows, is deciding to make it progress quickly. Participation and feedback simply take time. That's just the way it is. And I think that acting effectively is often an issue." (Participant 9)

Authentic leadership played a role in engaging in a feedback

dialogue, however not so strongly as both other leadership styles. ( $c$ -coefficient=0.17)

### Organizational culture and climate

For fourteen employees (93 % of the employees, 100% of the statements), a supportive learning climate appeared to be a factor that influenced their work and environment (see table 14). Multiple employees experienced the culture within the organization as open and accessible. This gave employees the feeling that they could easily start conversations. Another relevant factor for the open culture was the horizontal structure of the organization. This made employees feel that the coordinator was part of the colleague team.

**Table 14:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback and the Antecedent Organisational Culture and Climate.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Supportive learning climate	46 (0.90)	1 (0.01)	0	0

Given the school consists of three locations, the question arose if the school had one culture or there was rather a location culture than a school culture. As one employee stated:

"Because the different locations also intrinsically have a different culture. That also has to do not only with the coach but also with the students. I think they intrinsically have a different kind of culture because of the type of students there. The structure is different, which will always shape the culture. The colleagues are different. I also think that care coordinators are different" (Participant 10)

Table 14 shows that a supportive learning climate was strongly related to the engagement in a feedback dialogue ( $c$ -coefficient=0.90). It was mainly mentioned that there was a culture with much to discuss because of the innovative learning and teaching approach. It was also mentioned that the supportive climate was mainly location positioned because it was easier to have a feedback conversation among each other in one location than across locations. An employee said:

"But we all think it is very important to enter into feedback dialogues, and that is something that is installed very strongly in our coaching groups and also with our students. And yes, that is also very much embedded in how we work, dialogue with each other, and really try, suppose something has to be agreed, and we are there on different 'wavelengths', then we will really look for ways so that everyone feels okay with the decision that has been made. So, I think that we are all human beings. I think that that is also one of the strengths that we are all there together." (Participant 12)

### Relational antecedents

Eight participants addressed the issue of psychological safety (see table 15). Employees indicated that they felt vulnerable when receiving feedback and were therefore selective about the person they asked for feedback. One participant also mentioned that it can be challenging to speak out because they do not dare to. For example, one staff member said:

**Table 15:** Frequencies of Indicators of Relational antecedents.

Code	N (participants)	% (participants)	N1 (statements)	% (statements)
Psychological safety	8	53%	15	38%
Quality of interpersonal relationships	8	53%	25	62%

Ntot=15, N1tot=40

“With some because there is no safe feeling and I know things go back to the group, for example. Whereas it is not always appropriate there and also not as it was said. So then, I am very much on my guard. Uhm, if I notice that afterwards there is being chatted about or gossiped about, so to speak. Uhm. I find that very difficult” (Participant 11)

It was also mentioned that asking for feedback was uncomfortable for employees, especially in the beginning, because they saw the coordinator as superior. They first had to feel safe and that took some time. When they feel safe, you feel that what they think is said. They felt safe, and that was not the case in the beginning. At that time, they were still in a very new school, a new situation and this felt insecure. Safety is crucial. So, a coordinator

took the initiative to create a safe atmosphere by creating a set time for employees to give the coordinator feedback.

Employees noticed that the quality of relationships was essential for a feedback dialogue to happen and could turn out to be both positive and negative. Positive factors mentioned were interpersonal relationships, trust, equality, the number of years you have known your colleagues and like-minded people. In contrast, negative factors were a mismatch between personalities or physical distance between colleagues. An employee also mentioned that the threshold might be lower to ask for feedback from employees instead of coordinators. You feel less vulnerable as peers among each other than in relation to a coordinator (Table 15).

**Table 16:** Co-occurrences between the Steps of Dialogic Feedback dialogue and the Relational Antecedents.

Antecedents	Feedback dialogue	Feedback seeking behaviour	Feedback giving behaviour	Response of the feedback recipient
Psychological safety	15 (0.41)	0%	0	1 (0.03)
Quality of interpersonal relationships	25 (0.68)	2 (0.04)	1 (0.02)	3 (0.07)

Table 16 shows how strong the relational antecedents were related to engaging in a feedback dialogue. Especially the quality of interpersonal relationships was related to engaging in a feedback dialogue (c-coefficient=0.68) and more specifically to dealing with the feedback generated.

### Cultural antecedents

Meaningful units related to cultural differences did not appear in the interviews. However, two out of fifteen employees talked about the view of feedback in a Belgian culture, whereby employees like to do well and come across well, and feedback can quickly come across as criticism.

“And in Flanders that’s even already in our culture, we sometimes say that the Dutch are much more open. We don’t have that in our culture at all, so I guess it’s better to make yourself unhappy there for the sake of peace and make others happy.” (Participant 1).

### Conclusion and Discussion

With respect to the first research question, to what extent do employees engage in a feedback dialogue, findings indicate that 36% of the statements refer to the engagement in a feedback dialogue. This indicates that, next to this, many statements were about information and help seeking, so dialogues or conversations not including an evaluative aspect. Although at the start of the

interview, the interviewer explained the evaluative character of feedback and stressed he was looking for critical incidents referring to the engagement in a feedback dialogue, many interviewees turned away from the evaluative aspect of feedback seeking by referring in the critical incidents to more neutral behaviours such as information and help-seeking. In the same vein, Sherf and Morrison [81] argued that people are not inclined to seek feedback, even when they are advised to. They refer to the study of Kouzes & Posner [82] where supervisors were assessed by their subordinates. The findings showed that the statement: “. . . asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect other people’s performance” received the lowest frequency rating compared to 30 other managerial behaviours.

The findings show that feedback seeking is not limited to planned moments like during a performance appraisal interview but happened also spontaneously when meeting in the corridor.

According to Ashford et al. [28], three motives lead to seeking feedback: ego (to protect one’s ego), instrumental (to achieve valued goals), and image (to enhance or protect one’s image). When looking at feedback seeking behaviour, a motive of instrumental is found in almost all cases, where the need is to use feedback to achieve valued goals, especially in dealing with students. One participant also named the motive image by asking

for little feedback to protect the image. This might be related to the specificity of the setting, a new school adopting an innovative approach to learning and teaching with teachers continuously developing their competences to deal with the for them often novel requirements of the school's vision and approach. This confirms the findings of Ashford et al [28] that feedback has particularly high instrumental value in uncertain situations. Their review study indicates that under these circumstances people seek it more frequently as the feedback information generated is particularly valuable to foster their adaptation. If there is a supportive learning environment, this might trigger to engage in feedback dialogues to evaluate performance in the light of the novel school vision and approach.

Furthermore, in our study, the feedback seeking strategy mentioned was inquiry. Inquiry is characterised by the explicit verbal request for information, while monitoring is observing the actions and reactions of many people. This is in contradiction with the findings of Morrison [11] who found that newcomers mainly engaged in more monitoring than inquiring. Given monitoring is an indirect method of attaining feedback information by observation, this might explain that when we ask employees about their seeking behaviour during critical incidents, they mainly elicit the inquiry strategy [28].

Finally, in all incidents described by the interviewees, the dialogic feedback was constructive. Moreover, in nearly all incidents, the feedback source was the coordinator. This is explained by some interviewees as the coordinator lives the vision of the school, so he is the best to turn to when you are looking for a feedback dialogue about your own performance. This is surprising as in this setting where teachers take up different roles (subject expert, coach) and students are supported by a team of teachers. In this case, it seems there is a high task interdependency which is evidenced as motivating employees to seek feedback from peers instead of supervisors [46]. On the other hand, the employees' instrumental motive influences from whom people seek feedback. As Ashford et al [28] evidenced, "the more credible the source, the higher the instrumental value of their feedback, and thus the more likely individuals are to seek feedback from this source" (p. 778), in this case the coordinator, as s/he is perceived as the expert in this novel setting.

Research question two refers to the contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback. Given there is hardly any prior research on feedback dialogue or dialogic feedback in organizations, we based our theoretical framework on antecedents and our coding scheme on feedback seeking literature. Our first conclusion is that in general, the contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback elicited in the critical incidents confirm those described in feedback seeking literature.

With respect to the first contextual antecedent, the uncertainty context, the relation between strategic uncertainty and feedback dialogue is the strongest (compared to role ambiguity and contingency uncertainty) Strategic uncertainty is critical for the participants because they want their performance to align with

the organization's vision and especially want to check this with coordinators. This uncertainty appears mainly due to the school's innovative and unique vision and approach. The strong relation between strategic uncertainty and engaging in feedback dialogue confirms earlier findings indicating "that perceived uncertainty is positively related to the perceived value of feedback and through that to more frequent feedback seeking [30]. More recently, Anseel & Lievens [15] reported a curvilinear, U-shaped relationship between uncertainty and the desire for feedback. That is, individuals report the highest desire for feedback when uncertainty is both high and low. By contrast, when relating uncertainty to actual feedback inquiry behaviors, both Anseel & Lievens [15] and Anseel et al.'s [9] meta-analysis found that uncertainty had a negative impact on feedback inquiry. The latter authors hypothesized and found that this relationship was moderated by the seeker's certainty orientation, a general orientation aimed at avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity [22].

With respect to work pressure, in all interviews, the antecedent time is mentioned. A shortage of time can be a risk because too much time pressure can lead to a loss of enthusiasm, causes stress and negatively affects performance [83]. The feedback moments can also be endangered, with informal, unplanned moments being the most under pressure, according to some participants. The literature underpins this finding and indicates that time is essential for learning to reflect and exchange ideas [84]. This finding is also in line with Van der Rijt et al. [34] showing that too high and too low work pressure is related to less feedback seeking.

Concerning target-related antecedents, feedback quality has the strongest relation with engaging in feedback dialogue. This finding confirms a previous study of Whitacker and Levy [85] who evidenced that when a feedback source supplies high-quality feedback, this helps to develop contexts that stimulate self-enhancement by influencing the emergence of feedback utility. Perceptions of feedback utility in turn positively influence the frequency of feedback seeking from others in the workplace" (p. 172).

As a structural antecedent, all interviewees mentioned perceived organizational support as important for engaging in feedback dialogue. The organizational support mainly described were the conversations with the coordinator and the weekly planned intervention. This is in line with the findings of van der Rijt et al [34] indicating that the organization's learning culture is positively related to the frequency of employees seeking feedback, as well as to the quality of the generated feedback from the supervisor and from the colleagues.

With respect to leadership styles as a contextual antecedent of engaging in feedback dialogue, our results show that mainly a transformational and a supportive leadership style are described by the interviewees. Both have a strong relation with the engagement in feedback dialogue. This is in line with the results of the 2023 study by Cheng, Li, and Cao which shows a relation between transformative leadership and employees feedback seeking behaviour, with intrinsic motivation as a mediator.



Moreover, it is in line with Hinkin and Tracey's [51] argument that a transformational leadership style is effective during challenging stages. A transformational leadership style is recommended when an organization is in a start-up or scale-up phase, which is the case in our setting.

Our findings show a strong relation between experiencing a supportive learning environment and engaging in feedback dialogue. This finding confirms former research by Dahling, et al. [86] indicating that perceptions of a supportive supervisory feedback environment are associated with both higher instrumental and image enhancement motives. In our study, nearly all interviewees described an instrumental motive.

Concerning relational antecedents, our findings show that the quality of interpersonal relationships is even more related to engaging in a feedback dialogue than psychological safety. This is in line with the findings of the meta-analysis of Anseel et al.'s [87] stating that the association between high-quality relationships and feedback seeking behaviour is robust. This is specifically tested in the setting of employees seeking feedback from their supervisor.

Finally, the cultural antecedent is not reflected in our results.

This study offers some interesting insights. It seems that our interviewees, when asking to talk about situations in which they engage in feedback dialogue, experience feedback seeking, giving, and responding to it as an integral part of the feedback dialogue and not so much as different steps in a process. It underlines the notion that feedback dialogue is more than the sum of feedback seeking, giving, and responding to it. This is reflected in the co-occurrences analysis results where for most antecedents, there is a relation between the antecedents and engaging in a feedback dialogue and less in a relation between the respective antecedent and one of the steps in a dialogic feedback process.

Second, in this setting, it seems that although time and workload are strongly related to engaging in feedback dialogue, stress is less mentioned as related to feedback dialogue. Based on the study of Qian, et al. [37], given most of our interviewees see an instrumental value in engaging in feedback dialogue, the perceived image cost might act as a barrier. The authors have shown that in case of stressful situations, caring about the negative consequences of seeking feedback might hinder employees from seeking feedback. It seems that in our setting, the conditions for most employees are supportive enough not to suffer from stress although time and workload are high.

Third, although the teachers and coordinators in our setting fulfil various roles and tasks requiring multiple skills, there is a low relation between skill variety and engaging in a feedback dialogue. It seems the interviewees feel comfortable with needing a variety of skills and it does not act as an antecedent for dialogic feedback.

Finally, the importance of relational dependence as a crucial element of feedback dialogue is confirmed in our study. The interviews stress the importance of high-quality interpersonal relations, a transformational and supportive leader, and a

supportive learning climate.

Our study took place in a specific setting, using a specific method to collect data (critical incident technique with interviews). Although this approach has resulted in valuable insights, some remarks must be made.

Our research took place in a context where a new school was installed only a few years ago and the school extended year by year in opening new locations. This implies that our findings reflect what happens in schools where many newcomers enter the organization. Therefore, we suggest to cross validate our findings in schools which have a long history.

Secondly, compared to conventional schools, in our setting, the school has chosen an innovative learning and teaching approach. The employees are working hard on developing an innovative vision, strategy, and teaching and learning approaches. On the one hand, this is an optimal setting for engaging in feedback dialogue as there is a lot of uncertainty. On the other hand, in case there is no supportive climate, the high level of uncertainty might also result in less feedback dialogue to protect one's image. For future research, we suggest having a closer look at the relations between the different antecedents to understand how motives, uncertainty and structural and relational antecedents work together to enhance feedback dialogue.

Thirdly, according to literature, culture plays a role in the openness to a feedback dialogue. Hofstede [88] mentioned in his original ranking of forty countries that Belgium is number three in the list of uncertainty avoidance countries. This can explain why in our Belgian sample, more participants engage in information seeking than in feedback dialogue. Therefore, it is recommended that this study is replicated with a broader sample of participants from different cultural groups.

Fourthly, the advantage of using the critical incident technique is that this technique enables focus on the context. This is important as we were interested in the contextual antecedents of dialogic feedback. In addition, this technique does not force the respondent into a particular framework and allows the participants to choose the incidents that are important to them [89]. However, a limitation of this technique is that it is dependent on participants' ability to accurately provide a detailed account of a critical incident and to reflect on it [90]. For future research, we suggest combining observations with interviews shortly after the observation to enhance accurate recall. Moreover, we advise developing intervention studies in which specific contextual antecedents are manipulated to measure their effects on engaging in feedback dialogue. Finally, although our co-concurrence analysis indicates strength of associations, we cannot argue on causal relations. Therefore, we advise taking a longitudinal approach in future studies to unravel causal effects between the antecedents and dialogic feedback.

### Implications for practice

As noted, a dialogue is characterised by the art of thinking

together, whereby sustainable work is done on a collective inquiry [91]. However, this research has shown that employees are not always conscious of the type of dialogue they are involved in and rather turn into help seeking and information seeking. An organization that creates a learning environment where employees are supported to learn with and from each other through dialogic feedback, is a prerequisite if continuous professional development is aimed for. It will stimulate employees not only to turn to each other to help with certain issues or to go for information on specific topics, it will also support them in talking about one's ideas, vision, performance and how it is evaluated by relevant others.

In addition, uncertainty is often a trigger to learn and to go for dialogic feedback as a learning process. Challenging employees to innovate, involving them in innovations and at the same time offering support, stimulates them to engage in feedback dialogue.

Moreover, the supervisor plays an important role by showing a transformational and supportive leadership style. Propagating a vision in an inspiring way thereby impacting employees [49], reducing the turbulence and uncertainty in challenging organizational stages [51] (transformational leadership) combined with a high level of approachability, consideration for the needs of subordinates and friendliness (supportive leadership) will set the floor for dialogic feedback. Moreover, a supervisor acting as a role model by engaging himself or herself in dialogic feedback stimulates employees.

In addition, time is an important antecedent for engaging in feedback dialogue and is essential for learning to reflect and exchange ideas [84]. For example, our results indicated that employees felt that time was a limitation in seeking feedback from their coordinator. The organization may tackle this through interventions that enable employees to attend feedback dialogues by setting deadlines and planning meetings to engage in feedback dialogue [83]. A structural intervention where a particular feedback dialogue moment is integrated could bridge this gap. Formal meetings could help them stay focused and improve their organizational interventions. Different employees mentioned a buddy system to support feedback dialogues within a safe dyad setting, with employees that have the same function and align with their personal preferences related to feedback.

Next, the feedback source is an important issue. For example, research by Madjar [92] and Madjar et al. [93] discovered that valuable feedback sources to enhance innovative thoughts and ideas are created through the employees' heterogeneity in expertise and professional background. Therefore, creating opportunities for employee interaction across the borders of one's own unit or location can stimulate dialogic feedback among a diversity of employees, each with their own expertise and experiences. Also here, the coordinator can act as a role model in engaging in a feedback dialogue with all peers, within and outside his/her own location or unit.

To conclude, while previous research has focused on the influence of contextual antecedents on feedback-seeking behaviour, the present study explored the importance of contextual

antecedents for dialogic feedback. It is one of the first steps in the domain of dialogic feedback in organizations [94-96].

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and it has not been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

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