

**Openness as an aspect of tactful feedback: Implication for the  
management of educator competence**

**by**

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## SINOPSIS

In hoofstuk een is die stelling gemaak dat die evaluering van onderwysers nie uit enige onderwysstelsel verwyder moet word nie, aangesien dit noodsaaklik is vir die ontwikkeling van onderwyserbekwaamheid. Daar is verder aangetoon dat daar 'n behoefte is aan 'n effektiewe terugvoeringproses wat vir sowel die onderwysbestuurder en onderwysers aanvaarbaar is. In hoofstuk een is ook die motivering van die probleem, die probleemstelling, die navorsingsdoel, metodologie, verheldering van konsepte en die verdere verloop van die studie uiteengesit.

Hoofstuk twee het gefokus op 'n literatuurondersoek gerig op terugvoeringbekwaamheid en openheid binne taktvolle terugvoer. Die bespreking het gewentel rondom die volgende:

- Wat is bekwaame terugvoer en hoe word dit gekonstrueer?
- Wat is die eienskappe van taktvolle terugvoer?
- Hoe dra openheid as 'n aspek van taktvolle terugvoer by tot die bestuur van onderwyserbekwaamheid?

Die ontwerp van die navorsingsprojek is in hoofstuk drie uiteengesit. Die struktuur van die vraelys, die respondente, die verspreiding van die vraelyste en die ontleding van die data wat uit die vraelyste ontleen is, is bespreek.

In hoofstuk vier is die interpretasie van die empiriese data beskryf. Die navorsingsinstrument het voldoen aan die vereistes vir geldigheid en betroubaarheid.

Vervolgens is 'n vergelyking gedoen van een van die onafhanklike pare deur die toepaslike hipoteses te stel en die betrokke toetse te interpreteer. Die Student t-toets is aangewend om die verskille tussen die menings van manlike en vroulike respondente ten opsigte van terugvoeringsbekwaamheid te bepaal. Die verskille met betrekking tot drie

of meer groepe is ondersoek deur die groepe met die hoogste onderkwalifikasies as onafhanklike veranderlike ten opsigte van terugvoeringsbekwaamheid, te gebruik. Hiedie ondersoek is aan die hand van ANOVA (analise van variansie) gedoen. Die Scheffè-toets is gebruik om enige verskille tussen verskillende pare groepe te bepaal. Dit is opgevolg deur 'n kort bespreking van die verskille tussen die gemiddelde faktortellings van sommige van die onafhanklike groepe ten opsigte van terugvoeringbekwaamheid.

Belangrike bevindings, aanbevelings en gevolgtrekkings is in hoofstuk vyf bespreek. Hierdie aanbevelings bied 'n innoverende wyse waarop daar na bekwaamheid ten opsigte van terugvoering gelet kan word.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND AND ELUCIDATION OF THE PROBLEM

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

High quality performance can only come from competent educators or those with the capability to develop into competent educators. Educator competence can be determined by means of performance indicators and it is only when educators are committed to becoming competent that effective teaching and learning will produce the results.

The importance of educator competence is reflected by the establishment of the Educator Labour Relations Council in 1994 to deal with the criteria and process for the appraisal and evaluation and promotion of educators.

In the light of the above statements and problems associated with improving the quality of education a research project on educator competence and its assessment was implemented. A pilot study in 1994/95 identified eight factors associated with educator competence namely:

- The learning environment
- Professional commitment
- Order and discipline
- Educational foundation
- Educator reflection
- Co-operative ability
- Effectiveness
- Leadership

A further five factors dealing with the feedback received following the appraisal process were also identified. This particular mini-dissertation deals only with tactful feedback and more specifically with the openness of tactful feedback.

In view of the preceding brief introduction the motivation of the study will be discussed.

## 1.2 MOTIVATION OF THE PROBLEM

The education departments in South Africa has over the years implemented different policies, forms of evaluation and curriculum changes, often with no consultation with educators and stakeholders. This led to resistance against educator evaluation and caused evaluation of educators to collapse in many areas. Educators mistrusted evaluation, as they felt that the techniques fell short of collecting the sort of information that accurately characterizes teaching performance. They perceived rating as depending on the idiosyncrasies of the evaluator rather than on their own behaviour in the classroom. Educators in many areas of the world saw nothing to be gained from evaluation and regarded it as a threat to their employment and as an intrusion on their valuable teaching time (Wolf, 1971:160).

Educators did not want to be evaluated because they were also dissatisfied with the quality of the feedback received. Principals were often not candid, open and sincere, and their feedback also lacked valid information. The standard used to evaluate educators' competence also appears to vary from district to district and burdened evaluators with goals that are inconsistent with poor assessment practices. The goals were often not sufficiently specific and therefore feedback needed to be researched because it caused dissatisfaction among educators. The assessment of educators, however, should not be removed from any educational system, as it is necessary to develop educator competence.

As stated in the discussion document of the committee of educator policy (COTEP, 1994:10) educator competence can be evaluated in terms of a knowledge - skill - values paradigm. Educator opinion is, however, essential when formulating any structure in respect of the evaluation process. Educators presently consider the purpose of educator evaluation as a process of improving teaching practice. It also, however, serves the function of receiving much lip service because there is not much evidence that teaching practice is actually improving.

The supposition is that feedback which makes use of specific praise and criticism assists professional people with self-regulation. Since relatively few evaluation documents or processes to date have been agreed upon, competent feedback has often been inaccurate, shallow and at times degrading rather than constructive and uplifting.

However, there is no research as yet that shows beyond a doubt that evaluation practices and specifically feedback result in important cost effective educational practices in terms of improving educators or increasing learner learning. An effective feedback process that is acceptable to both educational departments and educators is therefore necessary.

In view of the preceding motivation of the problem the problem statement will now be formulated.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In the light of the preceding information the problem of this research project can be summarized in terms of the following questions:-

- What is competent feedback and how is it constructed?
- Which characteristics represent tactful feedback?
- How does openness as an aspect of tactful feedback contribute to the management of educator competence?
- To what extent can tactful feedback be used to enhance educator competence?

Having demarcated the research problem it is now necessary to state the aim of the research.

#### **1.4 AIM OF RESEARCH**

The general aim of the research project is to:

- investigate the components of feedback and determine how they can enhance the effectiveness of the feedback process.

In order to achieve the general aim, the aim of this group was to:

- investigate the factors involved in tactful feedback and how they affect the feedback process.

As a member of the group dealing with tactfulness as an aspect of competent feedback it was the specific aim of this mini-dissertation to:-

- Determine the importance of openness as an aspect of tactful feedback.
- Procure educator opinion as to what extent openness was present when feedback was provided.
- Devise a strategy indicating the role of openness in tactful feedback and how this can enhance effective feedback.

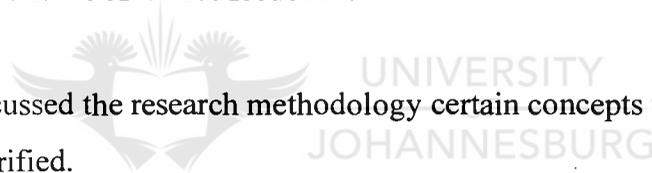
In view of the preceding problem and aim, the method envisaged in order to research the problem of competent feedback will now be discussed.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim in this study was to create a strategy to assist educational managers with the problem of providing feedback in a way that educator competence will be enhanced. It describes a phenomenon namely, competent feedback with specific reference to tactful feedback and the role of openness in the process.

Hence a literature review was used to determine how tactful feedback contributes to competent feedback. This was used as a bedrock for a structured questionnaire in an effort to procure educator opinion regarding openness as a facet of tactful feedback.

Having discussed the research methodology certain concepts used in this research are now clarified.



## **1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

### **1.6.1 Feedback**

Feedback is information provided to educators concerning the appropriateness of his/her teaching (Meyer, 1994:279).

Feedback normally occurs after the process of evaluation has occurred. The educator is actively involved during feedback and feedback helps the educator to develop his/her individual talents and it informs the educator what to do in order to improve (Sportsman, 1996:10).

### 1.6.2 Competence

To be competent means to be able to carry out the requirements of a specific task. Competence may, therefore indicate adequacy rather than excellence in a particular task which may be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Competence refers to any single knowledge, skill or professional value which is relevant to successful teaching practice (Peter Newsman, Keith, and Joseph, 1985:70).

### 1.6.3 Openness

Openness reflects a willingness and a desire to receive, consider and act ethically on information and possibilities of all kinds. Openness also makes it possible and desirable for divergent or unconventional viewpoints to be offered and considered seriously.

### 1.6.4 Appraisal

Performance appraisal is a process of determining and communicating to an employee how he/she is performing on the job and ideally establishing a plan of improvement.

Performance appraisal can also influence educators future level of effort and task direction (Byars and Rue, 1994:248).

### 1.6.5 Assessment

Assessment is the use of measurement and grading based on known criteria. It is therefore usually quantitative, precise and acceptable when used in relation to children but might have negative connotations when linked to educators.

### 1.6.6 Evaluation

Evaluation improves the quality of the learners' learning and also the functioning of the school. For most purposes evaluation is not in response to perceived problems but is seen as a professional responsibility.

According to McQuarrie and Wood (1991:93) the purpose of educator evaluation is to make a judgment about a professional under review. Evaluation refers, to an assessment and rating of a educator's performance in the classroom. It can also improve learner performance and understanding and can enhance the quality of the teaching and learning process. The individual conducting the evaluation of a educator is known as an evaluator (Hunt, 1992:144).

Ivancevich and Matteson (1996:60) assert the manager-leadership role involves directing and coordinating the activities of subordinates. An evaluator therefore directs educational activities.

Having clarified certain concepts the order of discussion for this mini-dissertation follows.

## 1.7 ORDER OF DISCUSSION

- Chapter one** : The introduction, motivation of the problem, problem statement, aim of research, research methodology, order of discussion and concept clarification are discussed.
- Chapter two** : A literature review on educator competence, the feedback process and its structure and competent feedback and openness within tactful feedback will be undertaken.
- Chapter three** : The design of the questionnaire and a discussion of

openness as an aspect of tactful feedback will be analyzed. The selection of respondents and distribution of questionnaires used in the study will also be discussed.

**Chapter four** : Analysis and interpretation of the empirical data obtained will be attempted.

**Chapter five** : A summary of the findings, recommendations and a conclusion will be given.

## 1.8 SUMMARY

In this chapter the importance of research on competence, feedback, educator evaluation, assessment and openness were discussed. The necessity of research into feedback and the research problem were stated.

A literature review in chapter two will be undertaken to further demarcate the research problem and to create a framework for the empirical investigation.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews the literature and provides the background and motivation for the study of openness as an aspect of tactful feedback and its implication for the management of educator competence.

Firstly an exposition of educator competence and aspects of evaluation will be undertaken after which the feedback process and some of the ways whereby it can be enhanced will be discussed. The questions to be answered in this exposition will therefore be:

- What is educator competence?
- What is the feedback process?
- What are some of the ways of enhancing feedback?
- Why is feedback necessary?
- How can openness enhance tactful feedback?

Educator competence will be the first aspect to be addressed.

### **2.2 EDUCATOR COMPETENCE**

COTEP (1994:10) defines competence as a cluster of integrated knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. The definition leads one to believe that a competent educator is one who has the ability to perform to standards expected of employees.

Monjan and Gassner (1979:81) define competence as an ability that an individual is required to have in order to be evaluated as competent. Tait (in Yule 1991:2)

refers to educator competence as knowledge abilities and beliefs, which are part of a educator's background and value system. The educator brings these qualities with him/her qualities, most of them subconsciously to the learning environment.

The competence of a educator needs to be tested in the working environment, and the headmaster or employer is the one who has to determine the competence of a particular individual. A headmaster can establish that a educator is incompetent from a pattern of recurring events or an accumulation or numerous examples of these shortcomings. Multiple measures will ensure a comprehensive and balanced evaluation.

According to Grobler and Van der Merwe (1995) competence in education is also associated with the necessary professional qualifications. A qualified educator may, however be qualified and have completed the necessary academic training, but that does not mean that he/she is necessarily competent.

Van Wyk (1987:85) points out that an appropriate teaching qualification is regarded as prima-facie proof of the educator's ability to give instruction within a specific situation. This means it is his/her proof of technical competence. Qualifications should, however, have relevance to the actual work task and lead to proof of on the job competence. They should prove the educator's ability to perform the actual tasks effectively.

In view of the above statement in defining competence, it is however still necessary to secure a behaviourally specific and culturally relevant definition of educator competence (Klemp and Mc Clelland, 1989:187).

The feedback process also, plays a crucial role in helping a educator to develop an acceptable level of competence within a particular setting. The feedback process now be discussed in terms of the existing literature.

## 2.3 THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

Feedback is considered central to the process of educator competence. This phase of the process focuses not only on what actually occurs between the educator and the learners, but also on what happens in the work environment. Feedback consists of a discussion of the data, analysis and an agreement about what follow-up will be done by each person. Feedback, here is conceptualized as occurring at any one or during all of the phases, provides an open channel for discussion and an evaluation of each phase. Hunter identifies six types of supervisory conferences which are a good example of how useful feedback may be provided. Feedback is the sine qua non of appraisal and supervision and provides a basis for staff development.

Feedback forms an ongoing part of a daily work life of professionals within a school (Holly and Southworth, 1989:109).

A feedback meeting which is a follow-up of educator evaluation, brings the evaluator and educator together in a discussion which can influence performance and improve future teaching (Goldhammer, Anders and Krajewski, 1980:142). Feedback can take many forms including oral feedback, written memorandums or a lengthy report (Sanders, 1994:49). Feedback has been identified as a key strategy for educator growth (Sweeney, 1992:11). It tells a educator what he or she must do to improve.

Accurate and clear feedback regarding performance is crucial to improvement (Fraser, 1990:178). Without feedback good performance can deteriorate and poor performance may continue (Spannenberger, 1994:134). Therefore educators who wish to develop holistically want evaluation and feedback that helps them grow professionally.

Feedback therefore allows the evaluator to express his/her appreciation, praise comments and criticism about the educator's performance in the classroom. Such feedback will be facilitated if it is well structured with clear and explicit goals so as to allow for a joint interaction between the evaluator and the educator (Guskey and Peterson, 1995:13).

The structure and characteristics of the feedback process will now be discussed.

### 2.3.1 The structure of the feedback process

The structure of the feedback process which normally takes the form of an interview is facilitated by the use of a well designed and acceptable format. For the interview to be effective in enhancing educator competence, the evaluator must have the ability to manage its various stages so that the feedback interview can be clearly defined and fully covered. A suggested structure as presented by Montgomery and Hadfield (1989:103-104) is as follows:

- welcome the educator;
- clearly explain the purpose;
- clearly explain the stages of the feedback process;
- outline the value of feedback to the educator and to the school;
- value the educator's contribution and discuss strengths;
- consider any problems areas and weaknesses;
- counter negative solutions by feeding in positive suggestions;
- consider the training needs of the educator;
- set targets together and action plans based on individual and school needs;
- agree on and sign a clearly recorded summary; and
- thank the educator for his/her contribution.

It is useful if notes are taken by both the evaluator and the educator during the feedback interview. These notes can be used as reminder of what was said and agreed upon and assist in writing up a clear and accurate record of the feedback. These notes and final records should be confidential unless other agreements were made when the evaluation system was introduced (Montgomery and Hadfield, 1989:104).

To implement the process of the feedback as discussed requires that the evaluator has the necessary skills in order to conduct the interview effectively. The key characteristics of feedback will now be discussed.

### 2.3.2 Characteristics of the feedback interview

The following characteristics are crucial during the feedback interview, namely:

- openness and clear communication;
- adequate time;
- the need for educators to take ownership of the feedback process to ensure that it is a shared dialogue between the evaluator and the educator on the basis of mutual trust and respect;
- it should be free from interruptions;
- it is viewed as a helping activity;
- it is conducted in private in order to prevent the educator feeling uncomfortable in the presence of colleagues; and
- it specifically focuses on educator's performance in terms of the evaluation.

In addition to the above, feedback can be enhanced if the evaluator has collected all the relevant facts during the evaluation and analysed them from different perspectives so as to accommodate different interpretations. Any variations in interpretation needs to be tactfully clarified during the feedback interview.

An effective interview should therefore, make sense to the educator and clearly reflect the objectives of the evaluation. Rabey (1994:98) further maintains that feedback should be:

- conducted within a reasonable and adequate time after an evaluation;
- intelligible so that the terms and the words are clearly understood by the educator. If necessary this should be tested by further feedback;
- appropriate so that the wording is relevant to the situation; and
- clearly written and unambiguous. This can be checked by discussion to ensure that the message has been clearly understood.

Finally, there needs to be a clear understanding by all participants as to how the process of feedback and the criteria adopted relate to the basic aims of the school (Bell, 1988:175).

Having introduced the characteristics of feedback it is now necessary to review what constitutes competent feedback.

### 2.3.3 Competent feedback

Competent feedback occurs when the evaluator displays an adequate or above average level of competence during the feedback process. According to Rabey (1994:87) competent feedback is characterised by the 6 C's, namely the feedback must be:-

- Clear
- Correct
- Courteous
- Concise
- Complete
- Continuing

The above key elements imply that the evaluator must be understandable, intelligible, precise, simple and unambiguous. These characteristics suggested that feedback communication between the evaluator and the educator should be tactful.

A discussion on tactful feedback now follows

#### 2.3.4 Tactful feedback

The word “tactful” is applied to a person who is diplomatic and judicious during feedback. In addition the person should be clear, polite and thoughtful in establishing a healthy rapport with the educator so as to assist in developing his/her talents (Bryant and Currin, 1995:252).

During such feedback educators are treated as professionals and they are given the opportunity to grow in a non-threatening environment by feeling comfortable with change.

Aspects of tactful feedback will be discussed in terms of the required skills criteria, outcomes and associated problems.

##### 2.3.4.1 Skills for tactful feedback

According to Montgomery and Hadfield (1989:105-107), skills for tactful feedback include the following:

- creating a welcoming “easy” atmosphere of mutual trust and reassurance;
- giving praise and encouragement whenever possible;
- listening effectively by demonstrating interest in the educator;

- communicating verbally using clear dialogue;
- clearly directing the course and pace of the feedback to bring out proposals, solutions and constructive suggestions;
- analysing and ordering the information ideas and aspirations of the educator;
- writing out a clearly worded, honest and objective summary;
- bringing the feedback to a satisfactory close; and
- generating a “good” feeling with emphasis on the educator’s professional and personal development.

The above-mentioned skills also need to meet certain criteria.

#### **2.3.4.2 Criteria for tactful feedback**

Tactful feedback will build continuous understanding between the evaluator and the educator. But this understanding, according to Rabey (1994:86-89) can flounder if the following criteria are not met, namely:

- know what should be said;
- transmit it in the most effective way;
- check if it was received and understood;
- listening for meaning;
- ask questions to make meaning clearer; and
- get all the information necessary to make the entire process as clear as possible.

If the above criteria are met, the feedback interview should end with the educator feeling valued, understood, supported and motivated, with an agreed action for achieving a specific set of negotiated, attainable targets within a defined period of time. The educator should also feel that there will be follow-up, interest and

support in the implementation of the action plan and that any necessary resources will be provided (Montgomery and Hadfield, 1989:104).

A well conducted tactful feedback should benefit the individual educator and the school as a whole. The educator often benefits by having his or her tasks clarified and is equipped with enhanced skills to work towards greater competence.

The process of being clearly understood and of being involved in negotiating targets can increase the educator's feeling of involvement and commitment. It increases the sense of collegiality of shared aims, joint effort and seeing how one's contribution is important to the school as a whole.

If educators who feel isolated are given the chance to be listened to attentively during the feedback process, they can reduce these feelings of separation and loneliness. A tactful feedback dialogue benefits the educator by increasing a sense of involvement and motivation and a feeling of being understood and appreciated.

There is also an increase in the school's awareness of the value of its staff. As well as having an up to date knowledge of the clearly defined roles and responsibilities of its educators, school management also gains knowledge about the classroom performance of its educators. It is an opportunity to formally thank and recognise the educator's contribution individually.

Decision-making is also facilitated in the light of the information gathered during the feedback process. Priorities are easier to identify and the educator's in-service needs are easier to organise and likely to be of great value when educators have indicated their preferences.

All the above benefits depend on the quality of the feedback. If this feedback is tactful and clearly understood by both parties, then the outcomes are positive. However, in some instances even the best schools are beset with problems in providing feedback. Such problems are presented below.

#### **2.3.4.4 Problems in providing tactful feedback**

Bell (1998:17) identifies two difficulties when providing tactful feedback. Training of evaluators may be required in many instances. On the other hand, evaluators may be faced with opposition and resistance from some educators.

In addition, time and commitment are required, especially from the school management staff. Discipline and honesty on the part of both the evaluator and educators are difficult to maintain.

However, such problems can be overcome through tactful negotiation where all areas of differences are clearly identified and educators given ownership in the feedback process so that there is a clearer understanding of expectations and responsibilities.

The next section focuses on the need for openness within tactful feedback in order to overcome all forms of misunderstanding and hereby enhance the whole feedback process.

### **2.4 OPENNESS WITHIN TACTFUL FEEDBACK**

One of the important criteria for tactful feedback identified by numerous researchers is openness. The Concise Oxford dictionary describes openness as “Anything not closed or blocked up especially of sound expression”. This definition implies that both the verbal and written communication between the

evaluator and educator during tactful feedback should be such that both parties openly communicate and understand each other.

The ex Department of Education's (D of E, 1998:61) instrument provides guiding principles which explicitly state that the process of appraisal should be "open and transparent" as this ensures both democracy and accountability. The openness prevents the appraisal being done in secretive ways as feedback needs to be open and transparent and all decisions need to be clearly justified and argued for. Reasons for arriving at decisions need to be made explicit and stated openly. This makes it possible for decisions to be balanced and fair.

Multiple means of communication are employed to ensure that everyone is well informed and understands the feedback process. The educator is open to criticism and alternative viewpoints and is able to express a good grasp of the nature of what is being discussed. Information is easily available if there is open feedback.

According to Senge (1990:227) there are two different aspect of openness namely: participative and reflective openness; unless the two are integrated, the behaviours of attempting to be open will not produce openness. Participative openness is the freedom to speak one's mind. It is the most commonly recognised aspect of openness. This is because the philosophy of participative management involving people more in decision-making is mostly espoused. While participative openness leads to people speaking out 'reflective openness' leads to people looking inward.

Reflective openness starts with the willingness to challenge our own thinking and it is based on skills not just good intentions. Senge (1990:278) sees openness based on skills which are:

- recognizing leaps of abstraction;

- becoming more aware and responsible for what we are thinking and not saying; and
- skills of dialogue and dealing with defensive routines.

These skills take time and persistence to develop and thus a “shifting the burden structure” often develops. Organisations that are serious about openness support their members in developing these learning skills.

The process of appraisal needs to be more open so that the appraisee must respond with the behaviour of participative openness and expressing views more forthrightly, solicit input and talk more with the appraiser about problems experienced. The more we talk to one another, the more we encourage educators to express their views. Talking to one another substitutes for genuine communication and dialogue (Senge 1990:279).

Senge further maintains that openness goes beyond a personal quality, and it is also a relationship that one has with others, it is a change in spirit, as well as a set of skills and practices.

David Bohm’s concept of dialogue in Senge (1990:284) alludes to the fact that openness emerges when two or more individuals become willing to suspend their uncertainty in each others’ presence. They become willing to share their thinking and susceptible to having their thinking influenced by one another. Bohm: (ibid) points out that, in a state of openness, they gain access to depths of understanding not accessible otherwise.

Openness has everything to do with intentions of commitment to serve one another, and a willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service. The best definition of the love that underlies openness is the full and unconditional

commitment to another, and willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service.

According to Steel (1975:7) openness means sharing with another person information which we have and which is at present hidden from others. Therefore we must be selective, and one's choice should constitute the selections process of what to share and when to share it. There are several levels to openness. The simplest is the sharing of information itself, as the sender and receiver know what formerly was known only to the sender.

A second level is concerned with control and influence, sharing information can be the sender's attempt to influence the receiver and also the sender's sharing of potential influences over the content area, and the receiver knows about it.

The third level is building of patterns over time and this is part of a total experience that sender and receiver have to build a relationship on. This leads to some kind of action or a signal that an action must be planned.

Since there is information about us to be disclosed after an evaluation or appraisal process, the order in which the feedback must be given will disclose different aspects of ourselves and will determine how we perform.

The open organisation has few official secrets. The assumption is that information is the lifeblood of the system and it is made available to all who request it. The system initiates methods for getting data, individual and groups initiate seeking out information. This gives a description of openness which can be categorised as follows:

- people share their feelings, reactions, and responses;

- there is a feeling of involvement with one another, which contributes to their confidence, others will listen and will respond;
- people become honest with themselves about “saving their own faces” as well as helping others avoid embarrassment;
- there is a high degree of group competence at screening and selecting topics to be discussed;
- the level of trust is high; and
- there is selective screening of what information will be shared.

Openness benefits significantly from reflection and inquiry skills, and from system thinking, knowledge and skills. Openness is more than a set of skills. O’Brian quoted in Senge (1990:285) states that: “we should be careful not to prescribe a clinical treatment of a spiritual subject. Openness goes beyond a personal quality. It is a relationship you have with others. It is a change in spirit, as well as a set of skills and practices”.

Learningful relationships are influenced by openness. When small groups of people (as few as two or three) become deeply committed and open they create a microcosm of a learning organisation. This microcosm does not only teach them skills they need, but becomes a model for others (Senge 1990:285).

The model implies an openness leveling and mutual trust between superior and subordinate. However, if subordinates distrust their managers or perceive their managers as being insecure, the effectiveness of this openness will be in great jeopardy.

Steele (1975:173) maintains that the lack of skills and competence in aspects of communicating or receiving feedback within a relationship of openness will foster bad experiences. This leads to a conformation of that belief that you cannot really share those kinds of weaknesses anyway and a pulling back to a more secretive

style will exist. He comes up with the following crucial skills needed in the developmental areas of communicating:

- saying what one means to say without clouding it with qualifications and a risk-reducing smoke screen;
- being able to listen to what someone is saying and perceiving the important central part of the message; and
- communicating feelings, as well as work “facts” in a manner which will help the receiver hear them accurately.

In order to increase the above-mentioned communicative skills Steele: maintains that something more than didactic teaching is required. The most potent method is a combination of:

- behavioural exercises designed to provide concepts and practice in these areas; and
- a period of specific process consultation with the client.

#### 2.4.1 Skills required for openness

The two main areas of skills required for openness during tactful feedback are listening and questioning.

Good listening is an active process, and is actually more than a skill, it is frame of mind. It can encourage the educator who feels attention is being paid to his/her words.

Therefore, listening effectively means that the evaluator should:

- pay attention by facing the person posing the questions and attempting to relax;
- signal interest and involvement; and
- notice any tension in the person being evaluate.

The necessity for evaluators to have these essential skills have been stressed by those actively engaged in the implementation and evaluation of the feedback process (Montgomery and Hadfield, 1989:110-111). Evaluators also need skills in being able to identify problems that may obscure openness.

#### 2.4.2 Problems that obscure openness

Certain problems can obscure a clear understanding of what transpired during the feedback interview. Montgomery and Hadfield (1989:107-108) have identified the following problem areas:

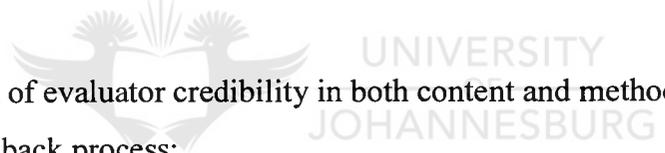
- poor preparation can result in inadequate understanding of the purpose of the whole process and feedback in particular;
- poor communication, lack of openness, lack of consultation, hurried introduction or imposed conditions can result in reducing feedback to a mere one way interaction;
- physical discomfort, an uncomfortable chair, a noisy situation and a lack of privacy can distract attention from the act and prevent the necessary degree of concentration;
- problems of status can detract from the success of a feedback interview. Some educators' find it difficult to accept or talk clearly and honestly about their weak characteristics if their evaluator is the principal for fear that this will influence their future position at school;

- not enough time provided for the feedback leaves both those involved frustrated. Any good feedback provided can be negated by a sudden ending. This leaves the educator with a lack of clarity about the outcome;
- a tense atmosphere. The educator fears seeking clarity on areas of uncertainty; and
- interruption of the feedback process can obscure openness.

Skills required for openness will serve no purpose if the evaluator involved displays certain attributes which obscure openness.

#### **2.4.2.1 Problems caused by the evaluator**

The evaluator may display characteristics which could possibly obscure the openness of the feedback process. These are:

- 
- lack of evaluator credibility in both content and methodology of the feedback process;
  - prejudice towards the values of the educator (Sanders, 1994:32);
  - a authoritarian judgmental attitude (Maddux, 1987:41);
  - inadequate preparation for the feedback. This could result in the evaluator not having sufficient knowledge of the educator's contribution and performance;
  - poor feedback skills for example, the evaluator talks too much, does not really listen or give the educator the opportunity to convey information meaningfully;
  - insufficient positive recognition of the educator's strengths;
  - feedback is seen as an opportunity to discipline the educator;
  - lack of directness and haste in the feedback process; and
  - an inability to make a summary of the important aspects.

In order to overcome the above problem, the evaluator should be tactful and credible. Research into evaluation systems has shown that evaluators who were inexperienced, out of date with educational developments and spent only a short time with the educator, were greatly resented and brought the whole feedback process into disrepute. A credible evaluator, however needs to have an unprejudiced, open-minded attitude, and be able to provide competent feedback (Montgomery and Hadfield 1989:102). It is therefore important to provide in-service training to the evaluator in order to enhance his/her feedback competency (Van Lakerveld and Nenwig, 1996:70).

#### **2.4.2.2 Problems caused by the educator**

The educator may also contribute towards obscuring the feedback process. This occurs when the educator displays the following characteristics:

- a tendency to “chat” rather than discuss issues;
- a lack of interest in providing information to the evaluator;
- aggression; and
- disaffection.

These factors can be a hindrance to open communication with the evaluator. Such problems can be prevented by giving serious attention to the initial stages of the evaluation process (Montgomery and Hadfield, 1989:108-110). Educators as adults want to be involved in a school through positive reinforcement and they prefer to operate in a collegial environment with their educational managers (Brandt, 1996:31). Openness during feedback should make the educator feel that their opinions will be recorded and taken into account. Consultation is essential if educators are to feel informed and involved within a collegial environment.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

The main findings of this literature review can be summarized in terms of educators' competence, the feedback process and openness within tactful feedback.

A competent educator can be regarded as one who performs to a capacity above that of the average performance. It is, however, not necessarily indicative that the educator is committed to his/her task of teaching and learning.

The feedback process plays an important role in enhancing educator competence. Openness and clear communication are important characteristics during the feedback interview. The structure of the feedback process requires the evaluator to develop an action plan together with the educator with the primary aim of developing any untapped and latent potential of the educator.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE DESIGN THE QUESTIONNAIRE THE COLLECTION OF DATA**

#### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The literature review in chapter two formed the framework for the empirical investigation. The specific aim was also highlighted as openness as an aspect of tactful feedback: implication for the management of educator competence. A brief discussion of the design of the instrument will be undertaken in the present chapter.

#### **3.2 THE INSTRUMENT OF RESEARCH**

##### **3.2.1 The design of the questionnaire**

The design of the empirical investigation was a structured questionnaire consisting of 106 open-ended items (see Appendix A). The items are based on research done by Van der Merwe and Grobler (1995). This research indicated that feedback competence was designed around the theoretical constructs of

- Invitational feedback.
- Credible feedback.
- Tactful feedback.
- Transparent feedback.
- Culturally sensitive feedback.

This resulted in 106 questions designed to obtain the perceptions of educators as to how often educational manager demonstrate certain behaviours pertinent to feedback.

Although this particular mini-dissertation deals with openness as an aspect of tactful feedback all the questions on tactful feedback are represented in Table 3.1. The questions relevant to openness are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

**Table 3.1: ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH TACTFUL FEEDBACK**

ITEM NO.	DESCRIPTION	MEAN SCORE	SD	RANK ORDER
	<b>In your opinion, when providing feedback to you, how often do educational managers:</b>			
B76	Leave you with distinct impression that you are making meaningful contribution towards success of the school.	3,38	1,34	18
B31	Ensure that good teaching performance is followed by personal recognition and praise	3,32	1,40	23
B50	Give feedback which is balanced so as to benefit both the school and the individual	3,29	1,29	27
B49	Indicate that the resources necessary to teach effectively will be provided	3,21	1,34	33
B4*	Ensure that the meaning of the feedback is understood through discussion and consensus	3,21	1,33	33
B104*	Share your assessment with you in the presence of a colleague of your choice	2,26	1,37	105
B78	Ensure that criticism is directed at a particular incident observed and not at the person	3,16	1,29	42
B32	Keep feedback short and simple so that the educator is not overwhelmed.	3,14	1,30	44
B11*	Give you a written report that is a true reflection of your classroom performance	3,09	1,50	
B87	Ensure that you are absolutely sure as to the purpose of appraisal	3,13	1,33	49
B77*	Discuss your specific area of weakness with the aim of providing in-service training.	2,94	1,38	79
B20	Also discuss your future career with you giving concrete examples of how you can gain promotion	2,58	1,45	
B6	Ask for your opinion about appraisal the process	2,80	1,37	89
B61	Set challenging yet attainable goals together with you	3,09	1,50	50
B105	Explain how a particular teaching behaviour was judged	2,71	1,37	93
B24*	Withhold information from you which could affect your promotion	2,64	1,44	95
B38	Take care to emphasize only the positive aspects and avoids the negative all together	3,02	1,33	59
B25	Avoid facial expressions which indicates anger, displeasure or hurriedness	2,97	1,35	73
B98	Clearly state which aspects of teaching having been evaluated	3,17	1,35	39

- \* = Items involved with openness as an aspect of tactful feedback.
- S.D. = Standard Deviation

Having displayed the different items involved in tactful feedback, only those items relevant to this research project namely openness as a part of tactful feedback will be discussed.

### 3.2.2 Discussion of openness as an aspect of tactful feedback

#### **3.2.2.1 Ensure that the meaning of the feedback is understood through discussion and consensus**

A feedback meeting which is a follow-up of educator evaluation brings the evaluator and educator together in a discussion which clearly embraces the success, problems and needs which can influence performance and improve future teaching (Goldhammer, Anderson and Krajenski, 1980:142 - see also 2.3).

Having discussed the importance of discussion and consensus when attempting to ensure openness it is now necessary to proceed to the second question on openness namely that of the principal discussing your performance with you in the presence of a colleague of your choice.

#### **3.2.2.2 Share your assessment with you in the presence of a colleague of your choice**

Feedback allows the evaluator to express his/her appreciation, praise, comments and criticism about the educator's performance in the classroom. Such feedback will be facilitated if it is well structured with clear and explicit goals so as to allow joint interaction (Guskey and Peterson, 1995: 13). Openness is enhanced if the principal is prepared to discuss teaching performance openly with you together with a colleague of your choice.

### **3.2.2.3 Give you a written report that is a true reflection of your classroom performance.**

It is useful if notes are taken by both the evaluator and the educator during the feedback interview. These notes can be used as a reminder of what was said and agreed to and will assist in writing up a clear and accurate record of the feedback provided (Montgomery and Hadfield, 1989: 104). Such a written record should be clarified in front of your colleague and signed by the parties involved.

### **3.2.2.4 Also discuss your future career with you, giving concrete examples of how you can gain promotion**

Feedback has been identified as a key strategy for educator growth (Sweeney, 1992:11). Constructive feedback tells a educator what he or she must do to improve. Accurate and clear feedback regarding performance is crucial to improvement (Frase, 1990:178). Therefore educators who wish to develop holistically want evaluation and feedback that helps them grow professionally (Searfoss and Ens, 1996:38). Feedback should generate a “good” feeling with emphasis on the educator’s professional and personal development.

### **3.2.2.5 Withhold information from you, which could affect your promotion**

An effective feedback interview should make sense to the educator and clearly reflect the objectives of the evaluation (Rabey, 1994:98). The pace of the feedback should be such that it brings out proposals, solutions and constructive suggestions. As feedback needs to be open and transparent all decisions need to be clearly justified and argued for. Reasons for arriving at decisions need to be made explicit and stated openly. This makes it possible for decisions to be balanced and fair. All information which could possibly affect your promotion need to be clarified. Principals normally give only that feedback which is positive

and often withhold unpleasant data such as that your classroom discipline may not be up to standard. It is unethical to withhold such information from an educator as this does not give him/her a fair chance to improve this perceived weakness and will affect his/her future promotion.

Having discussed the questions relative to openness the empirical investigation will now be reviewed.

### **3.3 THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

#### **3.3.1 Respondents**

Respondents were chosen from the various post levels of the teaching profession. It was felt that the perceptions of the educators at the various post levels relative to educator competence should vary and hence it was important to sample as wide a range of post levels as possible (see section A Question 2 of the questionnaire).

#### **3.3.2 Biographical details**

The following biographical details were requested namely gender, post level, age, teaching experience, highest educational qualification, province in which you are presently teaching, primary or secondary school, attendance of learners, attendance of educators and image of your school.

It was reasoned that these aspects could be related to feedback competence and could influence educator's opinions on how often educational managers demonstrated such behaviours.

#### **3.3.3 The research group**

Questionnaires were distributed to members of the teaching profession especially in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal. However educators from the other provinces

were also involved. Schools were selected on the grounds of their accessibility to members of the research team and all provinces except those from the Cape were represented in the sample. The sample could thus be classified as a conveniently selected one.

Principals were approached in order to obtain their co-operation. The questionnaires were handed to principals by a member of the research team and personally collected again after completion. Co-operation in most instances was excellent and this enabled a good return of questionnaires to be obtained.

### 3.3.4 Return of the questionnaires

The following figures summarize the information relevant to the questionnaires:

- Feedback competence

Handed Out	Returned - Useable	Percentage - returned
1 500	1 116	74,4 %

The questionnaires were sent to the statistical consulting service of the Rand Afrikaans University where data was transcribed and processed.

## 3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter a description of the empirical investigation was provided. The questionnaire was discussed and the course of the research briefly indicated. In chapter four the following aspects will receive attention:

- reliability and validity of the instrument; and
- some aspects of the data flowing from the statistical analysis will be examined, tabulated and interpreted.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF A SELECTED SAMPLE OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Due to the limit imposed on the length of a mini-dissertation a detailed discussion of the various statistical techniques is impossible. Hence the discussion will be limited to the following:

- a discussion on the validity and reliability of the research instrument;
- a comparison of one of the independent pairs by stating appropriate hypotheses and interpreting the statistical tests involved; and
- a comparison of one of the independent groups containing three or more groups by stating the hypotheses and analyzing the appropriate statistical data.

#### **4.2 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

To ensure content validity the questions were designed within the framework of the relevant theory using the eight constructs described by Van der Merwe and Grobler (1995). Several experts in the research field from the Department of Educational Sciences and from the Statistical Consulting Services of the University also reviewed the questionnaire to judge the relevancy of each item.

The construct validity of the instrument was investigated by means of successive first and second order factor analyses performed on the 106 items. The first order procedure involves a principal factor analysis (PCA18). This procedure was

performed by using the BMDP 4M program (Dixon, Brown, Engolman, Frane, Hill, Jenrich and Toporek, (1985:448-454) in order to identify a number of factors which may facilitate the processing of the statistics.

The ten factors obtained from the first order factor analysis were now used as inputs for the second order procedure. This consisted of a PCA 2 with varimax rotation and orthogonal axes followed by a PFA 2 with doblomin rotation.

This procedures resulted in the 106 items being reduced to two factors namely:

- Feedback competence consisting of 95 items with a Cronbach - alpha - reliability coefficient of 0,984 with no items rejected. The 95 items can thus be regarded as one scale with a maximum value of  $95 \times 5 = 475$  and a minimum scale value of  $95 \times 1 = 95$ .
- Unethical feedback consisting of 11 items with a Cronbach –alpha – reliability coefficient of 0,734. This reliability coefficient was regarded as being too low hence this factor was not used in any of the analyses. The factor on unethical feedback was thus discarded.

The factor named feedback competence is, however, valid with a high reliability and could thus serve as a basis for evaluating the feedback competence of the educational manager. Thus any weakness in feedback competence can be determined and appropriate training given.

Now that the validity and reliability of the instrument has been established the appropriate statistical analysis can be discussed.

### 4.3 HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses were formulated in respect of all the independent groups. Due to the restrictions in length imposed on a mini-dissertation only one comparison of two independent groups will be explained.

#### 4.3.1 Comparison of two independent groups

At the multivariate level two groups can be compared for possible statistical difference by means of Hotelling's  $T^2$  test. This implies that the vector mean scale scores of two groups are compared in respect of the factors taken together. Should a significant difference be found at this multivariate level then the student t-test is used in respect of each of the variables taken separately.

As only one factor is involved in feedback tests at the multivariate level are unnecessary and hence Hotelling's  $T^2$  is dispensable and student t-tests are sufficient to point out any significant statistical difference between the various groups.

Possible differences between the opinions of males and females in respect of feedback competence will now be discussed.

### 4.3.1.1 Gender Difference with respect to feedback competence

**Table 4.1** COMPOSITE HYPOTHESES WITH MALES AND FEMALES AS THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Dimension	Variable	Symbol	Description	Test
Differences at the single variable level	Gender	Hot	There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scale scores of males and females in respect of feedback competence	Student t-test
		Hat	There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scale scores of males and females in respect of feedback competence	



**Table 4.2** SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES REGARDING FEEDBACK COMPETENCE

Factor	Group	Factor Average	Student t-test (P-value)
Feedback Competence	M	295,97	0,2253
	F	302,35	

- M = (Males) = 349 (N = 349)
- F = (Females) = 767 (N = 767)
- \*\* = Significant at the 1 % level
- \* = Significant at 5 % level

Mean for feedback competence = 300,35

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference (P = 0,2253) between the mean scale scores of males and females in respect of

feedback competence. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  can thus not be rejected. In respect of feedback competence provided by educational managers there is thus no significant statistical difference in the perceptions of males and females. Females do, however have a factor average which lies above the mean average for feedback competence and hence females have a more positive perception of the feedback competence of principals.

#### 4.3.2 Comparison of three or more independent groups

In respect of three or more independent groups differences are investigated at the univariate level by means of ANOVA (analysis of variance) in respect of feedback competence. The mean scale scores are compared and should any difference be revealed the Scheffé test is used to investigate any difference between the various pairs of groups involved.

As an example of differences between three or more groups, the various highest qualification groupings are considered.

### 4.3.2.1 Differences between the highest qualification groups in respect of feedback competence.

**Table 4.3 COMPOSITE HYPOTHESES WITH HIGHEST QUALIFICATION GROUPS AS THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Dimension	Variable	Symbol	Description	Test				
Difference at the single variable level	Highest qualification	HoA	The average scale scores of the four highest qualification groups do not differ from one another in a statistically significant way in respect of feedback competence	ANOVA				
		HaA	The average scale scores of the four highest qualification groups differ from one another in a statistically significant way in respect of feedback competence					
		HoS	There are no statistical significant differences between the average scale scores of the four highest qualification groups when compared pairwise in respect of the following factor namely:					
Factor			Pairs of Groups					
Feedback Competence			AvsB	AvsC	AvsD	BvsC	BvsD	CvsD
			Hos.AB	Hos.AC	Hos.AD	Hos.BC	Hos.BD	Hos.CD
Differences at the single variable level	Highest qualification	HaS	There are statistically significant differences between the average scale scores of the four highest qualification groups when compared pairwise in respect of the following factor namely:					
Factor			Pairs of Groups					
Feedback competence			AvsB	AvsC	AvsD	BvsC	BvsD	CvsD
			Has.AB	Has.AC	Has.AD	Has.BC	Has.BD	Has.CD

**Table 4.4** Significance of difference between the highest qualification groups in respect of feedback competence

Factor	Group	Factor Average	P-value (ANOVA)	Scheffé					
				AvsB	AvsC	AvsD	BvsC	BvsD	CvsD
Feedback Competence	A	323.32	0,0002 **	*	*	**			
	B	300,84							
	C	298,02							
	D	287,96							

A = Lower than Grade 12, Grade 12; Diploma

B = Educator's Diploma

C = Diploma plus Degree

D = Degree plus

\*\* = Significant at the 1 % level

\* = Significant at the 5 % level



Using Tables 4.3 and 4.4 it follows that HoA is rejected at the 1 % level of significance. The deduction can be made that there is a statistically significant difference between the average scale scores of the four highest qualification groups A, B, C and D in respect of feedback competence. The null hypothesis HoA is thus rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis HaA.

Regarding the pair-wise comparison of the groups the following conclusions can be made:

- There is a statistically significant difference at the 1 % level between the mean factor scores of educators with educational qualifications lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or a diploma and those holding a qualification of a higher

HoS. AD is thus rejected in favour of HasAD. Educators with qualifications lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or a diploma thus perceive educational managers to be significantly more competent in giving feedback than do educators holding a degree or a higher qualifications. This is possibly due to the need for guidance and support by educators with qualifications that are lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or a diploma. On the other hand, educators holding qualifications of a degree or higher possibly to seldom seek guidance and support from their educational managers.

- There is a statistical significant difference at 5 % level between the mean factor scores of educators with qualifications lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or a diploma and those holding a educator's diploma and between the average scale scores of educators with qualifications lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or diploma and those holding a diploma and a degree.

HoS.AB and HoS.AC are thus rejected in favour of HaS.AB and HaS.AC. Educators with qualification lower than Grade 12, Grade 12 or diploma thus perceive educational managers to be significantly more competent in giving feedback than do educators holding a educator's diploma or a diploma plus a degree.

Significant statistical differences were also found between most of the other independent groups investigated. Due to the limits in length imposed by a mini-dissertation these difference are summarized in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5 MEAN SCORES OF SOME OF THE INDEPENDENT GROUPS IN RESPECT OF FEEDBACK COMPETENCE**

NAME	CATEGORY NAME	NO.	MEAN SCORE
			FEEDBACK COMPETENCE
Gender	Men	349	295,97
	Women	767	302,35
School Type	Primary	611	305,28*
	Secondary	505	294,39*
Post Level	Educators	764	295,92
	Educator with merit awards	161	302,76
	Head of Department	120	313,75
	Higher Promotion Post	71	319,94
	20 – 30 years	316	301,99
	31 – 35 years	270	288,98**
	36 – 40 years	217	295,53
	41 + years	313	311,85**
Highest Qualification	Lower Grade 12; Grade 12; Diploma	161	323,32**
	Educator's Diploma	441	300,84*
	Diploma; Degree	244	298,02*
	Degree plus	270	287,96**
Province	Gauteng	689	292,02**
	Kwa-Zulu Natal	426	327,80**
	Other	181	294,52**
Home Language	Afrikaans	148	303,29
	English	263	283,48**
	Sotho	213	* 295,43
	Nguni	374	* 319,40**
	Indian	64	* 280,37
	Tsonga	40	* 284,55
	Other	14	288,64
Religion	Christian	860	303,77**
	Islam	86	293,53
	Hindu	104	273,19**
	Other	66	307,47
Attendance of Learners	Good	367	310,78**
	Average	686	298,89**
	Poor	63	255,54**
Attendance of Educators	Good	498	313,92**
	Average	558	293,74**
	Poor	60	249,22**
Image of School	Excellent	273	322,10**
	Good	553	308,12
	Average	219	* 273,21**
	Disturbing	71	* 239,97**

\*\* = Significant Difference at the 1 % level

\* = Significant Difference at the 5 % level

#### **4.4 BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FACTOR MEAN SCORES IN TABLE 4.5**

The various factor mean scores obtained by the independent groups in respect of feedback competence is summarized in Table 6 and it is necessary to briefly explain the differences observed. First the independent group will be cited and this will be followed by a brief discussion.

**Gender:** Women have a higher factor mean score in respect of feedback competence than men do. Women thus have a more favourable opinion than men do in respect of the feedback competence of education managers.

**School Type:** Educators who have gained most of their experience in primary schools have a higher factor mean score and differ from the scale of secondary school educators at the 5 % level of statistical significance. Primary school educators thus have a more favourable opinion about the feedback competence of educational managers than do secondary school educators. This is probably due to the fact that secondary school educators are subject specialists and it is more difficult to convince such wide variety of subject experts of your feedback competence.

**Post Level:** Although no significant differences occur between the factor mean scores of various groups there is a direct proportion between the factor scores of the various groups. There is a direct relation between the various post level group and the feedback competence of educational managers in the sense that the higher the post level the higher the factor the mean score of their feedback competence. It is expected that Heads of Departments and educators occupying promotional post above the Head of Department will have the perception that educational managers provide competent feedback as these groups probably mostly have had reasonably positive experiences concerning feedback.

**Highest Qualification:** Educators with a degree or higher qualification have the lowest factor mean score and differ from educator with the lowest educational qualification at the 1 % level of statistical significance. Educators with the lowest qualification also differ from the other two groups at the 5 % level of statistical significance. There is an indirect proportion between the various qualification groups and the feedback competence of educational managers in the sense that educators with the highest qualification have the lowest factor mean score. Educators who are well qualified are probably well versed with the many intricacies of feedback and it is expected that they should have the opinion that educational managers are not as competent at providing feedback as they should be.

**Province:** Educators from Kwa-Zulu Natal have the highest factor mean score and differ from educators in Gauteng and other provinces at the 1 % level of statistical significance. This significance difference could be due to the fact that educators in rural communities do not easily criticise persons in position of authority as this is against the normative system prevalent in rural communities. On the other hand the collaborative competence of Kwa-Zulu Natal educational managers has been shown to be high and it is possible that Kwa-Zulu Natal educators perceive their educational managers as competent providers of feedback (see research project on educator competence, 1996).

**Home Language:** Nguni speaking educators have the highest factor mean score and they differ statistically from educators with English as home language at the 1% level. Nguni speaking educators also differ at the 5 % level of statistical significance from Sotho, Indian and Tsonga speaking groups. The Afrikaans speaking educators have the second highest factor mean score and they thus also perceive their educational managers as possessing feedback competence as they also have a high regard for persons in position of authority.

**Attendance of Learners:** Educators with the perception that learner attendance at their school is good have the highest factor mean score and differ from those groups who perceive learner attendance to be average and poor at the 1 % level of statistical significance. There is also a direct proportion between the attendance of learner and the feedback competence of the educational manager. This is indicated by the fact that educators who perceive the attendance of learners at their schools to be poor also believe that educational managers are not very competent when it comes to providing feedback.

**Attendance of Educators:** There is a close parallel in the results between educator and learner attendance. Educators with the perception that educator attendance at their school is good differ at the 1 % level of statistical significance from the groups who perceive educator attendance at their schools to be average and poor. These results seem to indicate a direct link of some sort between educator attendance and the feedback competence of educational manager and it is possible that educators perceive the attendance of educators in their schools to be good because the feedback given by the educational managers is of a higher quality.

**Image of the school:** There is a direct proportion between the feedback mean scores and the image of the school as indicated by the fact that educators who perceive the image of the school to be disturbing are of the opinion that the feedback given by their educational managers is not up to the standard of the other groups. Educators who perceive the image of their school to be excellent have the highest factor mean scores and differ from the average and disturbing groups at the 1 % level of statistical significance. Educators who perceive the image of the school to be average also differ at the 5 % level of statistical significance from the factor mean score of educators who believe the image of their school to be disturbing. Competent feedback is all about effective communication and it could be that educators view the image of the school as disturbing because of lack of

communication on part of educational managers (see project on managerial communication in schools, 1996).

The two successive factor analyses performed on the 106 items in the questionnaire indicated that feedback competence has construct validity. The statistically significant difference highlighted in the discussion above indicates an ability to distinguish between groups that are known to differ from one another. This corroborates the findings of the factor analysis and indicates that feedback competence has construct validity.

Competent feedback should thus consist of the following aspects namely it should be:

- invitational in nature;
- credible;
- tactful;
- transparent; and
- contain cultural sensitivity.



#### 4.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter an analysis and interpretation of some of the empirical data was undertaken. The construct validity of the research instrument was investigated by means of two successive factor analyses which reduced the 106 items to just two factors namely:

- feedback competence consisting of 95 items with a reliability coefficient of 0,940, and
- unethical feedback consisting of 11 items with a reliability coefficient of 0,734.

An instrument, which has construct validity, should be able to distinguish between groups which are known to differ from one another. It can be seen from the data in Table 4.5 that many of the groups which one expects to differ significantly from one another do indeed differ in their perception of feedback competence.

The limited scope of the mini-dissertation rationed the research to a comparison of one example of two independent groups and one example of three or more independent groups. Hypotheses were set and multivariate statistical tests were used to analyze and interpret the data.

From the research conducted it can be concluded that feedback competence consist of a single construct. This factor has construct validity with a high reliability and could thus serve as a basis for measuring and developing the feedback of educational managers.

In chapter five a summary of the research will be given. Important findings will be discussed and recommendations will be made.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The general aim of the research project was to investigate the components of feedback and to determine how they enhanced the feedback process. The group as a whole investigated the factors involved in tactful feedback. The specific aim of this mini-dissertation was to determine the importance of openness as an aspect of tactful feedback. This was investigated by procuring educator opinion as to what extent openness is present when feedback is provided, and devise a strategy indicating the role of openness in tactful feedback and how this can enhance effective feedback.

The research topic was chosen in order to assist educational managers and educators to negotiate an acceptable means of evaluation procedures and feedback at a time when there is an urgent need to upgrade educator competence at our schools in order to meet the requirement of today's information age (Buono, Nurick and Hoffman, 1995:18).

The Department of Education has recently released a document in respect of educator appraisal in South Africa (DOE, 1998:2) which aims at improving culture of teaching in institutions and attempting to develop educators. Little has, however, been said about feedback. It is necessary to establish a fair and equitable means of educator evaluation which should be followed by tactful feedback. This should enrich the professional roles of educators by focusing on "doing the right things" rather than on "doing things right" (Darling – Hammond, 1996- pp6-7). Such collaboration where educators work together to assist in problem solving for example, educators taking the same grade or educators from

different institutions involved in teaching a particular learning field or consulting with support services of the Education Department (DOE, 1998:3).

This being the final chapter, it is necessary to recapitulate the salient point of the research project under the following headings:-

- Summary
- Important findings
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

## **5.2 SUMMARY**

In chapter one it was stated that educator evaluation should not be removed from any educational system, as it is necessary in order to develop educator competence. It further added that the need for an effective feedback process acceptable by both educational managers and educators was necessary. Chapter one was also concerned with a motivation to the problem, problem statement, the aim of the research, the research methodology, concept clarification and the order of discussion.

Chapter two focused on a literature review by investigating educator competence feedback and openness within tactful feedback. This was discussed in terms of

- What is competent feedback and how it is constructed?
- Which characteristics represent tactful feedback?
- How does openness as an aspect of tactful feedback contributed to the management of educator competence?

The design of the research project was explained in chapter three. The structure of the questionnaire and respondents, the distributor of questionnaire and procession of data gathered upon completion of the questionnaires.

The analysis and interpretation of empirical data was discussed in chapter four. The research instrument satisfied the requirements for validity and reliability.

This was followed by a comparison of one of the independent pairs by stating appropriate hypotheses and interpreting the test involved. The Student t-test was used to establish the differences between the opinions of male and female educators in respect of feedback competence. The differences in respect of three or more groups was investigated by using highest qualification groups as independent variable relative to feedback competence. This was done by means of ANOVA (analysis of variance). The Scheffè test was used to investigate any differences between various pairs of groups. This was followed by a brief discussion of the differences between the factor mean scores of some of the independent groups in respect of feedback competence.

## **IMPORTANT FINDINGS**

### **5.3.1 Findings from the literature in respect of openness as an aspect of tactful feedback and its implication for the management of educator competence**

The literature survey indicated that feedback is facilitated if the educational managers clarifies its purpose and clearly explains the stages of the feedback process to the educator. It is also important to agree on and write out a clear and accurate record of the main issues discussed during the feedback process (see 2.3.1).

Some of the crucial characteristics of a feedback interview are clear communication and the need for educators to take ownership of the feedback so that there is a shared dialogue on the basis of mutual trust and respect. Effective feedback should therefore, make sense to the educator and clearly reflect the objectives of the evaluation (see 2.3.2).

The skill required for tactful feedback include a clear direction of the course and pace of feedback to bring out constructive suggestions to improve educator competence. It also involves communicating verbally and non-verbally in a clear dialogue in order to direct the course and pace to bring out proposals and constructive suggestions with emphasis on educator's professional and personal development (see 2.3.4.1)

The criteria for tactful feedback requires the educational managers to transmit feedback in the most effective way and check if it was received and understood. He/she should also listen for meaning, ask questions and get all information necessary to make the entire process as clear as possible (see 2.3.4.2).

A feedback interview that is well conducted is of benefit to the educator and the school. The process of being understood by the educational manager leaves the educator with a feeling of being valued, understood, supported and motivated. The process of being clearly understood and of being involved in negotiating targets can increase the educator's feeling of involvement and commitment. These aspects facilitate decision-making and create a feeling amongst educators that they are being understood and appreciated for their services at school (see 2.3.4.3).

Good listening by educational managers become evident when the educational manager pays attention, signal interest and notice tension. Effective questioning,

on the other hand, contributes to the feedback interview by establishing facts, and clarifying the educators' behaviour or response (see 2.4.1).

Factors that obscure openness during the feedback interview are:-

- Poor preparation can result in inadequate understanding of the purpose of the whole process and feedback in particular.
- Poor communication, lack of openness, lack of consultation, hurried.
- Introduction or imposed conditions can result in reducing feedback to a mere one way interaction.
- Problem of status.
- A tense atmosphere.
- Lack of time.
- Interruptions during the feedback interview (see 2.4.2).

Problems that obscure openness may be caused by both the educational managers and the educator. The educational manager may be inadequately prepared and regard feedback as an opportunity to discipline by focusing on personality rather than performance and display an authoritarian and judgmental attitude (see 2.4.2.1). The educator, on the other hand, may become aggressive and lose interest in making progress or he/she may display a defensive and aggressive attitude and lose interest in providing information avoiding a discussion on the real issues concerned with teaching and learning (see 2.4.2.2).

The main findings of this literature suggest that openness has a key role to play during the process of tactful feedback. It enhances interaction and understanding between educational manager and the educator. The educational manager is thus able to develop an action plan together with the educator with the primary aim of developing the untapped and latent potential.

### 5.3.2 Important empirical findings in respect of feedback competence

Feedback competence consists of two factors, namely:

- feedback competence which consist of 95 items with a Cronback-alpha – reliability coefficient of 0,984; and
- unethical feedback consisting of 11 items with Cronback-alpha – reliability coefficient of 0,734.

Since the reliability coefficient on unethical feedback was too low, this factor was not used in any statistical analysis.

In respect of feedback competence significant statistical differences were found between the perception of educators as reflected in the mean factor scores of the following groups:-

- School type, educational qualifications, province in which one is presently teaching, home language, attendance of learners, attendance of educators and image of the school.

In respect of these significant differences the following findings are important:-

- Principals need to be aware that educators in secondary schools are subject specialists and hence it is advisable that principals make use of their heads of departments to evaluate educator competence (see 4.4). Principals should rather focus their efforts on aspects of classroom management styles and certain personality characteristics (Grobler, 1992:248).

- Educators who are academically well qualified are more critical of the feedback competence of educational managers (see 4.3.2.1). Principals thus need to be well prepared and make use of multiple sources including self-appraisal in order to obtain as much data as possible (Grobler, 1992:248). This enhances the objectivity and credibility of the appraisal process and demonstrates a sense of commitment to professional educator development.
- Principals in Gauteng need to be aware that educators in this province are critical of their feedback competence. Particular attention needs to be given to aspects such as openness and trust, tactfulness and credibility during the feedback process (see 4.4).
- Evaluation should also be sensitive for the cultural differences between the various language groups in South Africa (see 4.4). English speaking educators are most critical of feedback competence of educational managers. Therefore, principals need to be well trained in aspects related to educator appraisal system such as culturally sensitive feedback.
- Learner attendance, educator attendance and school image are all measures of democratic school climate and it is clear that there is a relationship between these aspect and the feedback competence of educational managers (see 4.4). If these aspects of democratic school climate are well managed and met, commitment of educators and learners will be enhanced and educator competence and the culture of teaching and learning will also benefit.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATION**

The main aim of the research project was an investigation into openness as an aspect of tactful feedback and its implications for the management of educator competence. In order to realise this aim a literature survey was undertaken and

this served as the foundation upon which the empirical research could be based. The findings of this research are now amalgamated by the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation one**

- 5.3.1 Competent educational managers should ensure that the purpose, objectives and stages of the feedback process are clearly explained to the educator as openness during tactful feedback enhances feedback competence and contributes positively towards the management of educator competence.

### **Recommendation two**

- 5.3.2 A educator should have the opportunity to take joint ownership in the feedback process so that there is consensus with the educational manager in embracing the success, problems and needs which can influence performance and improve future teaching.

### **Recommendation three**

- 5.3.3 The educational manager should ask questions listen to the educator's view point and obtain all the information necessary to make the feedback process as clear and uncomplicated as possible. These assist the educator in clearly understanding what is expected of him/her as a competent educator.

### **Recommendation four**

- 5.3.4 The feedback report should clearly describe the aspects being evaluated, including its context and findings of the evaluation so that essential information is provided

to the educator as it will give him/her a fair chance to improve this perceived weakness so that it should not affect his/her future promotion.

#### **Recommendation five**

5.3.5 Educational and district managers should be give appropriate training or inset programmes to enhance their feedback skills so that competent feedback that is relevant to their needs of the school can be given to their educators. The educational management departments and universities and educator training colleges should play a key role in the training programmes.

#### **Recommendation six**

5.3.6 The educational manager providing the feedback should be competent, and trustworthy to perform educator evaluation so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.

#### **Recommendation seven**

5.3.7 Feedback is a vital aspect of management communication which influence the school climate directly. Competent feedback is likely to have a positive influence on the management of educator competence which should improve the school climate and impinge directly on the culture of teaching and learning in the school. Feedback competence is an important aspect for the management of educator competence and it should be included in any future educator evaluation system.

#### **Recommendation eight**

5.3.8 Topics for further research:-

- The status of the educational manager and its influence on the management of educator competence (see 2.4.2).
- Evaluator credibility: implications for educator evaluation (see 2.4.2.1).
- Honesty as an aspect of tactful feedback and its implication for the management of educator competence (see 2.4.2.1).
- Educational qualification of educational managers: implication for the management of educator competence (see 4.3.2.1).

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

This research project has identified the important need to enhance the competency of educational managers in South Africa especially at a time when changes in education are being negotiated.

The need to devise an evaluation system that is credible and acceptable to members of the teaching profession cannot be underestimated. This requires the service of competent educational managers who are prepared to declare an appraisal instrument that will provide, enhance and support a community of professionals. This community will be supported by a framework that is intimately linked in a shift from service provision to professional empowerment that will bring a belief in educators to make sound decisions about their professional development.

The findings and recommendations of this study provides a new kind of thinking about feedback competence. In order to reinforce this new thinking and to achieve educational goals of South Africa an outcome based approach needs to be adopted not only to educator competence but also to the outcome criteria for in-service training of educational managers. This should assist in clearly defining roles of educational leaders and subsequently enhance the management of educator competence that will have a way for the youth to enter the globally competitive world with confidence.

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