The Naturalistic Study of Performance Feedback in a Higher Education Administrative Setting

Karen M. Reese
Western Michigan University

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THE NATURALISTIC STUDY OF PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK
IN A HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE SETTING

by
Karen M. Reese

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
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requirements for the
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Examined in this study is the performance feedback provided to administrative staff at the research location and the relationship of that feedback to performance. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 27 subjects at a small midwestern coeducational public university. Six research questions were investigated: the conditions under which feedback occurs, the sources of feedback and their relative usefulness, barriers to feedback giving and seeking, and the relationship of feedback to performance.

The desire to correct a deficiency was the primary catalyst to informal feedback being given to staff. Supervisors became aware of staffs' deficiencies through observation and complaints from others. Staff received feedback from six sources: the formal organization, co-workers, supervisors, the task, self, and clients. Whereas co-workers and supervisors were the sources most frequently mentioned as feedback providers, clients and self were reported as being the most useful. Although formal evaluation was mandated by the board of regents, evaluations were conducted inconsistently and in a perfunctory manner.

The quality and quantity of formal and informal feedback were largely dependent on three factors: (1) the nature of the job
(task-oriented jobs provided more feedback on the work flow process), (2) the commitment of the supervisor, and (3) the feedback seeking behavior of the subordinate.

Generally, supervisors felt that their staff received enough performance feedback, but subordinates found the amount insufficient. Supervisors did not provide more feedback because of the perceived emotional issues associated with this activity. Subordinates did not seek more feedback because the organizational culture was not supportive of such behavior. Physical proximity of supervisor and subordinate related positively with frequency of feedback.

Supervisors perceived feedback contributed to improved performance. Subordinates, however, were able to provide few examples of when they changed their behavior because of the feedback they received.

Similar qualitative studies should be done at other universities, both like and unlike the institution studied. Additionally, evaluation studies should be conducted in work environments which implement one or more of the recommendations for practitioners included in the study.
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The naturalistic study of performance feedback in a higher education administrative setting

Reese, Karen M., Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1992

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Karen M. Reese
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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY

The Context

Matters of productivity and accountability have become increasingly important to national leaders, as this country's position of economic world leader is being challenged successfully by other nations. Institutions of higher education have had to deal with similar concerns, as the cost of a college education has doubled in the last decade, and a variety of publics want to know if "they get what they pay for." In both settings, top-level decision makers have created separate human resource departments to manage the most valuable resource, their employees. Managing the human resource includes developing policies and devising strategies to maximize employee performance.

Authors of management literature agree that the functions of managers are planning, organizing, staffing, directing or leading, and controlling (e.g., Bittel & Newstrom, 1990). These functions are essentially the same, regardless of the level of the manager and the nature of the enterprise (e.g., Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976, preface; Newman, Summer, & Warren, 1967). An aspect of the control function is monitoring staff performance, including providing performance feedback.
Providing employees with feedback has a beneficial influence on their performance (Berry, 1985; Daresh, 1989; Enright, 1984; Fairbank & Prue, 1982; Stroul, 1988). Managers design motivating environments when they ensure verifiable goals are set; plans to achieve objectives are made; and control tools, information, and approaches furnish people with the feedback knowledge they must have for effective motivation (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976).

Feedback is also relevant to employee satisfaction and motivation. Ammons (1956) presented 11 generalizations about the importance of people having knowledge about how they're performing, one of which was that such knowledge contributes to the employee being more highly motivated to perform. Hackman and Lawler (1971) also addressed the importance of performance feedback in discussing job characteristics which facilitate internal motivation for employees: "An employee cannot experience higher order need satisfaction when he performs effectively unless he obtains some kind of feedback about how he is doing" (p. 264). More recently, Bittel (1974), writing on the practical aspects of supervision, stated: "People want to know where they stand--even if it isn't good" (p. 199).

Although managers may recognize the importance of providing feedback to help staff improve their capabilities and performance (e.g., Kanter, 1983; Larson, 1984; Orth, Wilkinson, & Benfari, 1987), recognition of the importance does not necessarily lead to widespread practice. Walther and Taylor (1983) suggested providing performance feedback "may be one of the most important and most overlooked processes in the practitioner's world of personnel
management" (p. 107). Brown (1982) decried the lack of attention managers give to performance feedback, stating the need to come to grips with modern requirements of management. Others, such as Schon (1975) and Enright (1984), have made the point that feedback is a management function even more essential today because of the necessity for organizations to be able to change as the environments in which they exist change.

In his discussion of deutero-learning (the capacity to solve problems) in organizations, Schon (1975) argued that the competence and feedback systems to ensure on-line learning are critical to managing change. Similarly, Enright (1984) included providing good feedback as one of the three practical ways managers help and support staff so they are more resilient and excited by the opportunities to be found in change. Although Michael (1975) agreed with Schon and Enright that feedback is essential to the organization, he acknowledged there is much resistance to feedback within many organizations. Michael offered three reasons for the resistance: (1) ambiguities in goals and objectives make it difficult to specify the type of feedback to get, (2) time and money are constraints, and (3) feedback is viewed as disrupting. Sayles (1964), while agreeing that control is a management function, stated that it is a myth that most managers are successful in communicating to subordinates what is expected. To the contrary, he said: "In the real world of the organization, the subordinate is barraged by stimuli, both positive and negative, and is left with the problem of interpreting their possible meaning" (p. 158).
There appears to be agreement, then, that providing feedback is an appropriate and desirable management function. Yet, there also appears to be agreement that the function is not universally or systematically performed by supervisors. This remains true even though logic would support there is a financial cost to the organization when staff performance is less than effective. The question becomes, "Why not?" Are there reasons supervisors, even while believing in the desirability of providing feedback, do not fulfill this aspect of their responsibility? Does more feedback occur within organizational settings than is realized? Under what conditions might feedback be shared to a greater extent between supervisors and subordinates?

Conceptual Basis of the Study

Theoretical Propositions and Assumptions

The research on performance feedback is based on several theoretical propositions and assumptions about the relationship of feedback to staff performance. Two propositions relevant to this study are:

Proposition 1: Workers want feedback on their performance.

The work of Arps (1917) is frequently cited in the literature concerning the influence of knowledge of results as a factor in work. Arps conducted experiments using a Bergstrom ergograph in which subjects were initially provided no feedback on the amount and character of the work they were performing and on a subsequent
occasion given every opportunity to observe their work as it proceeded and to study the results. Arps concluded from his research that subjects have a tendency to avoid working blindly. He further concluded workers will imitate the mental processes they used during work sessions when they were aware of results during those sessions when they are only partially aware of results. Arps's research has been referenced by others as an indication that work carried on without feedback loses in efficiency and, in the absence of feedback, workers will try to find their own means of obtaining feedback on their results. Additional support for this proposition can be found in Ammon's (1956) survey of the research on knowledge of performance; Hackman and Lawler's (1971) research concerning work motivation; Hackman and Oldham's (1975) work in developing the Job Diagnostic Survey; Halisch and Heckhausen's (1977) research concerning the feedback seeking behavior of children; and the work of Erez (1977); Locke, Cartledge, and Koeppel (1968); and others on knowledge of results and goal setting.

Proposition 2: Supervisors have a responsibility to provide staff with performance feedback.

Although the work culture exists regardless of the actions of management, the degree to which the culture has a positive effect on some desired outcome is largely determined by the behavior of managers and how these behaviors are perceived by subordinates. The manager has impact on the positiveness of the work culture through the use of missions, goals, rewards, feedback, and support (Lashbrook, 1984). Lashbrook maintained that the manager is responsible
for providing subordinates with accurate and sufficient feedback. If the manager fails in this regard, subordinates will invent feedback which is often unrealistic and distorted.

Also relevant to this study are two assumptions which have guided the research on feedback and for which the research data base is insufficient to raise them to the level of theoretical principles.

**Assumption 1:** Giving and receiving feedback is a performance related skill.

Feedback is a subset of communication and indicates that the sender of the message obtains some acknowledgment from the receiver as to whether or not the message was received as intended. The language used in a message seldom has exactly the same meaning to the recipient as it does to the communicator. Even if the recipient understands the message, he may reject it or distort it if it is not consistent with the individual's beliefs, values, and self-image. Distortion is more likely to occur when the message is ambiguous. The degree of acceptance by the receiver is further influenced by his emotional state, his perception of the sender's intentions, and the sender's credibility with the receiver (Wexley & Yukl, 1984). As conveyed by the description, feedback is a complex construct. The implication for managers is that skill development in both sending and receiving messages for both supervisors and subordinates will enhance performance feedback.

**Assumption 2:** Feedback improves work performance.
Ashford and Cummings (1983) referred to the positive effect of feedback on performance as an accepted psychological principle. Ammons (1956) stated that where knowledge of performance is given to one group and such knowledge is withheld or reduced with another group, the former group learns more rapidly and reaches a higher level of proficiency. Although the assumption that feedback improves performance is the basis for much of the research concerning performance feedback, there are few examples of studies which have directly linked feedback with improved performance in a work setting. What examples there are tend to be situations where productivity measures were fairly easy to define; for example, Florin-Thuma and Boudreau (1987) provided feedback on the portions employees served in a yogurt shop and the feedback resulted in smaller portions.

Definitions

Leadership in organizations is influencing employees to accomplish the goals of the organization (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1988; Hersey, 1984; Kanter, 1983). By inference, then, the supervisory effectiveness of leaders in institutions of higher education should be judged on their ability to influence subordinate staff to perform tasks which support the educational mission, goals, and objectives of the institution. The logical sequent to the inference is that staff performance is the degree to which an employee accomplishes the tasks assigned to him by the organization, with the assumption being that the assigned tasks have
been designed to further the organization's goals.

One generally accepted definition of human performance feedback is that it is a special case of the general communication process in which a measurement of actual performance is related back to the individual or unit so action can be taken to correct, or narrow, the variance between actual and desired performance levels (Bittel & Newstrom, 1990). A second definition, offered by Ashford and Cummings (1983), is that feedback is a subset of information available to individuals in their work environment which tells them how well they are meeting various goals. As explained by Ashford and Cummings, feedback encompasses an active role for the recipient; for example, when uncertainty exists, an individual may be motivated to seek feedback. Similarly, Greller and Herold (1975) and Hanser and Muchinsky (1978) suggested that the individual may be actively monitoring his environment for personally relevant information from a variety of sources. For purposes of this study, performance feedback is defined as information an individual receives which enables him to determine how well he is doing his job; the definition includes self-monitoring and other feedback seeking behaviors.

Those who write about naturalistic research use a variety of terms to describe the technique (naturalistic, qualitative, phenomenological, case study, humanistic, etc.), and they seem to avoid defining the concept directly, instead opting to cite its characteristics. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined naturalistic inquiry by describing 14 characteristics, while Bogdan and Biklen (1982) discussed five features of qualitative research. For
purposes of this study, naturalistic research is defined similarly to Merriam (1988): It is descriptive research concerned with process (how things happen) and meaning (how people make sense of their lives and experiences), with the researcher as the primary research instrument (responsive to the context and able to adapt techniques to the circumstances), and conducted with subjects in their natural setting.

Contributing to the Body of Knowledge

Research on the influence of feedback on staff performance is relevant to supervisory staff at all organizational levels because of its potential impact on policy and practice and employee effectiveness. Claiming that interest in feedback has been sustained because of its performance-enhancing effect, Ashford and Cummings (1983) stated: "As such, feedback forms an important resource for the organization. It is in essence a tool that organizational leaders have at their disposal with which they can motivate, direct, and instruct the performance of subordinate members" (p. 371).

The construct of feedback has been addressed in the literature under a variety of headings, such as: (a) the importance to learning of knowledge of results, (b) people want feedback, (c) the formal appraisal, (d) feedback and goal setting, (e) feedback seeking behavior, (f) feedback and performance, and (f) the attributes of feedback.

Research studies on performance feedback have been conducted primarily by using college classes as laboratories and have relied
on experimental and ex post facto designs. The research that has been conducted in the field has been done almost exclusively in business and industrial settings. (The review of literature produced few instances of research on performance feedback involving higher education settings, and none which studied university administrative staff on the topic.) These approaches to studying feedback have been advantageous. Experimental methods and class settings have allowed researchers to isolate the diverse elements which make up feedback as a construct and to control for confounding variables. Survey research has simplified the collection of much perceptual data on the topic.

Feedback is not a simple stimulus, however, and positivistic research methodologies have not addressed the complexity of the construct. The attention to internal validity may have been at the expense of external validity, however, for there is no evidence of the generalizability of the findings conducted with college students as subjects and classrooms as settings to the world of income producing work (D. L. Stone & Stone, 1985). As stated by Landy, Farr, and Jacobs (1982), most of the studies about feedback have involved explicitly giving feedback; however, data collected in work settings are very limited concerning how much feedback is given, to whom, and under what conditions.

Management practitioners in any setting could benefit from research assessing how much and what kinds of performance feedback actually occur in the work environment and the circumstances under which feedback either occurs or doesn't occur. Such knowledge could
lead to more enlightened practices on the part of both those responsible for providing performance feedback and those who are the intended recipients. It is anticipated that increasing the quantity and quality of performance feedback in the work setting will lead to improved employee performance.

This study was undertaken to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning performance feedback. Two aspects of the study will provide new insights concerning performance feedback in work settings: (1) the phenomenon was studied in a higher education setting, and (2) the research design involved a case study approach and a naturalistic research technique, semistructured interviews. Field research may provide new perspectives on the constructs of feedback and performance and the relationship between them. Although the findings will be of special interest to management practitioners in higher education, new perspectives concerning feedback and performance should be of interest to managers in any organizational environment.

An Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the performance feedback provided to administrative staff in a higher education organizational setting and the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. The study was conducted at a midwestern coeducational public university of 3,000 students. Twenty-seven subjects were interviewed over a 2-month period during the summer of 1991. The subjects were (a) senior administrative staff who
supervise administrative professional staff or other senior administrative staff, and (b) the staff whom they supervise. The study employed a naturalistic research design, specifically, semistructured interviewing.

Two broadly stated research questions, and 10 subordinate questions which provided additional focus, were identified for study. These questions guided collection of the interview data.

Research Question 1: What is the general nature of the feedback that occurs in a higher education administrative setting?

1. How much and what kinds of feedback do staff receive? Is it enough?
2. From what sources and under what circumstances do staff receive feedback?
3. Under what circumstances do supervisors give feedback?
4. Do supervisors provide feedback with planned intent or is the giving of feedback incidental?
5. Do staff seek feedback and how?
6. What are the barriers to staff seeking feedback?
7. What are the barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff?

8. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback?
9. What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?
10. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?
The data were analyzed inductively, following methods recommended by qualitative research authorities (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984). During data analysis, a decision was made to collapse the seven questions under the first broad research question into three subordinate questions:

1. Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?

2. Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

3. Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

This decision was made to reduce redundancy in presenting the findings. The subordinate questions under the second broad research question were not altered.

Advantages and Limitations of the Study

The research methodology selected for this study had two major advantages: (1) Employing a naturalistic research methodology allowed the phenomenon of performance feedback to be studied in its complexity, and (2) the collection of data through semistructured interviewing expedited collection of a large amount of perceptual data. The advantages of the human-as-instrument technique, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were also a factor; that is, the researcher's ability to respond to personal and environmental cues, adapt, observe the scene "all in one piece" (p. 194), comprehend "tacit" (p. 195) knowledge, process data immediately, clarify and
summarize, and explore atypical responses. In spite of these advantages, the methodology also presents certain limitations.

Interviewing as a data gathering technique has drawbacks. Some of the potential problems with interviews relate to the instrument, that is, the researcher herself; for example, issues concerning the wording of questions, the possible leading nature of questions, establishing rapport, probing to add to the richness of data, and responding appropriately and with sensitivity. The integrity and interviewing skills of the interviewer play key roles in the quality of the data collected. Another limitation concerns those interviewed. Although subjects are able to tell what they do and why they do it, ... any given person may be no more able to describe and explain his own actions than anyone else's: His vocabulary may be poverty stricken, or his perspective too difficult to comprehend. ... Interview or questionnaire procedures constitute situations in their own right; therefore, what persons report in either case often better reflects those situations than the referential ones which the techniques were designed to ascertain. (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 6)

The amount of data collected through interviewing presents a challenge to the researcher during the data analysis phase. In order to analyze the large volume of data, the researcher must make judgments about what is important and what is not. The researcher also controls data interpretation, assessing the relationships among chunks of data and assigning meaning to what was relayed. The accuracy of the findings are dependent upon the researcher's analytical and synthesis skills.
In carrying out the methodology of this study, the researcher encountered a problem concerning the sample. Thirteen of the original pool of subjects were unavailable or declined to participate. Whether or not the contributions which could have been made by this group would have been quite different from the contributions of those who did participate cannot be known.

The obvious reliance on the researcher-as-instrument in qualitative research means that the skill of the researcher is central to the quality of the research. Although the researcher for this study had an extensive background in higher education administration, which enabled her to empathize and understand the contributions made by the subjects, and had interviewed people for other purposes, she had not previously carried out qualitative research.

The remainder of the dissertation is presented in four chapters: In Chapter II the literature concerning performance feedback is reviewed; in Chapter III the research methods are described; the research findings are reported in Chapter IV; and Chapter V presents the conclusions derived from the findings and recommendations for practitioners. Chapter V also includes implications of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between feedback and staff performance in a higher education administrative setting. In this chapter, the body of literature concerning performance feedback is reviewed. The chapter is organized under three headings: Feedback Literature in General, Feedback Research in Higher Education, and Feedback Research and Naturalistic Design.

Feedback Literature in General

Research on the topic of performance feedback has been approached from two broad perspectives (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). The first perspective is the research on human performance with its basis in experimental psychology. There is "a large body of experimental research relating one or two dimensions of feedback to a given response (or set of responses) with little concern for the intermediate psychological processes triggered by the feedback" (p. 349). The second perspective concerns feedback in organizational settings which is social psychological in orientation. As noted in Chapter I, there has been a long-standing interest in feedback as a phenomenon, and a variety of topics have been addressed in the research and management literature: the knowledge or results, people want feedback, the formal appraisal, feedback and goal
setting, feedback seeking behavior, feedback and performance, and the attributes of feedback.

Knowledge of Results

The seminal work by Arps (1917) concerning the influence of knowledge of results as a factor in work performance was reviewed in Chapter I. Another writer often referenced in the literature concerning performance feedback is Ammons (1956). Ammons reviewed and summarized the factual information available in the research literature concerning knowledge of results. He derived 11 generalizations from his review, each based on "one or more reasonably adequate studies" (p. 280). Although all 11 generalizations have some relevancy to the study of performance feedback, several stand out as being central to the topic:

1. "For all practical purposes, there is always some knowledge of his performance available to the human performer" (p. 281). People will set up their own hypotheses and goals if they are not provided for them.

2. "Knowledge of performance affects rate of learning and level reached by learning" (p. 283). Where knowledge of performance is given to one group and knowledge is effectively withheld or reduced for the other group, the first group will learn more rapidly and reach a higher level of proficiency.

3. "Knowledge of performance affects motivation" (p. 286). In general, the more a subject knows about what and how he's doing, the more highly motivated he's likely to be.
4. "The more specific the knowledge of performance, the more rapid the improvement and the higher the level of performance" (p. 287). The more exactly a subject knows how he's performed, the more likely he's able to take corrective measures.

5. "The longer the delay in giving knowledge of performance, the less effect the given information has" (p. 287). Although this is generally true, according to Ammons, there is an optimum delay for every task and state of learning. If the knowledge comes too soon, it may not be able to be used by the learner.

People Want Feedback

Four of the research studies reviewed demonstrated that people want feedback. Trope and Ben-Yair (1982) conducted experiments to investigate how people use tasks to assess their abilities. In one study they found when subjects could choose items for self-constructed tasks, they chose items which would give them feedback on the tasks that would assess their abilities in areas where they were least certain. In a second experiment, subjects were found to be more persistent with tasks which were less diagnostic. Working independently, Trope (1975) conducted an experiment with 102 male subjects from introductory psychology classes and concluded the stronger the achievement motive, the stronger the tendency to seek information about one's own ability. Zuckerman et al. (1979) found that individuals who expect to perform well are more likely to seek information about their ability than those who expect to perform poorly. Brickman (1972) found that individuals who received
information discrepant with their expectations tended to search for more information than those who received information consistent with their expectations.

**Research on Formal Performance Appraisal Systems**

The formal performance appraisal as a method of providing feedback on work performance is mentioned frequently in the literature. Most research of this type has focused on the psychometric characteristics of the appraisal instruments, counseling people on the basis of the appraisal instrument, and the cognitive processes of the rater (Napier & Latham, 1986). Another body of research has involved training staff in some aspect of performance appraisal; for example, conducting the interview (Goodall, Wilson, & Waagen, 1986), involving employees in developing the rating scale (Silverman & Wexley, 1984), the value of training (Beaulieu, 1980; J. Davis, 1984; B. L. Davis & Mount, 1984a, 1984b), rater accuracy (Latham, Wexley, & Pursell, 1975; Schneier, 1986), and the advantages of a multitrait-multirater approach (Lawler, 1967).

Several studies have focused on employee satisfaction with the appraisal interview with inconsistent results. Dipboye and de Pontbriand (1981), Greller (1975b), and Wexley, Singh, and Yukl (1973) found a positive relationship between participation in the interaction and subordinate satisfaction with the interview; however, Hillery and Wexley (1974) found in conducting research with college and high school students that nonparticipative interviews seem to be more effective with young, inexperienced workers. Beer
and Ruh (1976) instituted a performance management system at Corning Glass Works which separated staff development and staff evaluation functions. Data collected by means of a questionnaire distributed to employees who had used the system for 1 or 2 years indicated staff were generally very positive about the system: Supervisors accepted some form of performance feedback as part of their jobs and subordinates seemed to be less anxious about performance appraisal.

Napier and Latham (1986) interviewed management employees at a newsprint facility and administered a questionnaire to bank employees concerning the performance appraisal. They found from the interview data that people were clear on the purpose of the performance appraisal; but even though comments were positive about the process, appraisals seldom occurred. Supervisors did not believe that the ratings on the appraisal affected the subordinates' status, nor did they feel they were rewarded for doing them. According to the authors, both studies suggest that "many appraisers see little or no practical value in conducting performance appraisals, regardless of whether the feedback is primarily positive or negative" (p. 834).

Feedback and Goal Setting

Another focus of the research concerning performance feedback is its relationship to goal setting performance. Latham and Yukl (1975) reviewed 27 reports of field research concerning goal setting in organizations. Four of the studies on feedback in combination with goal setting supported the importance of frequent and relevant
feedback for goal setting effectiveness. Three of the studies, which involved feedback without goal setting, did not produce consistent results. They found strong support for Locke's (cited in Latham and Yukl, 1975) propositions that specific goals increase performance; and difficult goals, if accepted, result in better performance than do easy goals. Latham and Yukl concluded, however, that field studies did not provide relevant evidence concerning Locke's proposition that goal setting mediates the effects of performance feedback.

In subsequent research in a laboratory setting, Bandura and Cervone (1983) found that goals enhanced performance effort only under conditions combining a personal standard for performance with feedback on progress toward reaching the goal. In a field experiment involving salespersons in a large nonunion retail organization, Kim (1984) found that goal setting and feedback involving both behavioral and outcome measures had a greater effect on performance than did goal setting and feedback involving only behavioral measures or only outcome measures. Ivancevich and McMahon (1982) compared the effect of certain types of feedback in combination with goal setting on performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. One of the findings was that self-generated feedback with goal setting was superior to externally generated feedback with goal setting on five of seven variables. Matsui, Okada, and Inoshita (1983), however, found that goal setting and feedback tended to induce a greater task effort from the low-progress subjects than from the high-progress subjects.
Feedback-Seeking Behavior

Ashford and Cummings (1983) developed a theoretical model of feedback-seeking behavior by individuals in organizations. The authors suggested that individuals will engage in two sets of feedback-seeking strategies, monitoring strategies (observing the situation and the behavior of others for cues), and inquiry strategies (directly asking others). Inquiry strategies are more likely to be used when (a) the individual determines the feedback is valuable to them, and (b) the feedback they receive is inadequate. Individuals do not frequently engage in feedback-seeking behavior because such behavior has perceived costs, both in regard to the amount of effort required and the possibility for loss of face.

Feedback and Performance

Three articles which were reviewed specifically address feedback followed by improved performance. Alavosius and Sulzer-Asaroff (1986) observed staff lifting and transferring patients in a residential care facility. Staff were then given written and verbal feedback on their performance of the task. When the results after feedback were compared with baseline data, the findings were performance during baseline was variable, whereas performance after feedback was near perfect in the lifting techniques used. Arnold (1985) conducted research with undergraduate students whereby the subjects played computer games. Following each session, they were given feedback on their level of accomplishment. The results
supported that, when accurate performance feedback is available, levels of task performance will influence perceived competence and attributed causes of performance. The third study was conducted by Florin-Thuma and Boudreau (1987) and involved giving feedback to workers concerning portion size in a yogurt shop. Feedback resulted in more accurate portion size.

A fourth study, conducted by Nadler, Mirvis, and Cammann (1976), was somewhat unique because it involved providing feedback to a branch bank (a unit rather than an individual recipient of the feedback). Feedback regarding performance of the unit was fed back over a year's time. The differences in performance level between units were largely attributed to the skill of the manager. The authors further recommended that the use of a feedback system must be clearly stated as part of the manager's job.

Research Concerning the Attributes of Feedback

Feedback Source

The matter of feedback credibility frequently has been linked to feedback source. Research has concerned the number of sources available in a work setting and the relative credibility which each has with supervisors and subordinates. Greller and Herold (1975) investigated five sources of feedback (the formal organization, supervisor, co-workers, the task, and one's own self) for their informativeness and found sources which were intrinsic, or psychologically closer to the individual, were seen as providing more
feedback information than those sources identified as external, or psychologically distant. In subsequent research, Greller (1980) asked employees and their supervisors in a metropolitan transit authority to rate the usefulness of feedback sources. He found supervisors and subordinates disagreed on the value of particular sources of feedback. Supervisors rated reward, boss, and assignments higher than did their subordinates, whereas they rated coworkers, the work of others, and the task itself lower than subordinates. The three supported by supervisors are all sources under supervisor control, while the three receiving less support are outside of the supervisor's control. Greller cautioned that his findings provide cause for concern in that supervisors clearly overestimate the importance of the feedback they provide but fail to recognize the value subordinates attach to sources under their own control.

The research by Hanser and Muchinsky (1978) regarding source of feedback produced findings similar to those of Greller and Herold (1975). Hanser and Muchinsky found source of information was perceived by faculty as being more important than the type of information (either referent or appraisal).

Herold, Liden, and Leatherwood (1987) replicated earlier studies which had confirmed that five sources of feedback can be distinguished in work settings and acknowledged a sixth source in some settings, clients. The order of the sources, from least positive to most positive, as supported is as follows: (1) the formal organization, (2) co-workers, (3) supervisors, (4) the task itself, and
(5) one's own feelings and ideas.

The work of Wexley and Nemeroff (1975) concerning positive reinforcement and goal setting in developing managers demonstrated the positive influence of self-monitoring in reinforcing the performance of management skills presented during training. Similarly, Olds (1977) claimed that the improved performance which resulted from implementing a program of performance feedback and employee self-monitoring in a national company was not a temporary phenomenon but a matter of permanently improved performance.

Peers as a source of feedback were studied by Cederblom and Lounsbury (1980). Faculty at a small university completed a questionnaire concerning their opinions about the value of peer evaluations, a system which had been practiced for 6 years at the university. The findings indicated a relatively low degree of user acceptance of the practice of peer evaluations. The authors viewed peer evaluation as a promising assessment method and suggested the purpose for which the evaluation was requested may be a factor in the negative reaction to them; that is, for purposes of promotion and tenure or administrative decisions concerning employment. The faculty studied seemed to prefer the use of peer evaluations for purposes of providing feedback, rather than evaluative information for salary or promotion reasons.

Specificity

Research findings support that feedback specificity has a positive influence on feedback acceptance, performance outcomes, and the
preference of subjects for specific rather than nonspecific feedback. In an early study conducted among industrial workers, Hundal (1969) studied three levels of feedback specificity on productivity and found, as feedback became more specific, subsequent performance improved.

Three other studies which were reviewed supported the preference of subjects for specific information. Ilgen, Mitchell, and Fredrickson (1981) found poor performers preferred specific, negative feedback to nonspecific feedback. In a study involving undergraduate business majors rating hypothetical scenarios of professors' feedback to students on grades, Liden and Mitchell (1985) found subjects preferred: (a) specific feedback to nonspecific feedback, and (b) feedback which suggested an external cause of poor performance to feedback that suggested an internal cause. Research by Earley (1988) involved 60 male and female magazine subscription processors. Subjects received either specific or general feedback from a computer monitoring system. The feedback was presented to the subject by a supervisor or was self-generated by the worker using the computer system. Subjects reported greater trust in feedback from an internal (self-generated from computer) source than from an external source (supervisor). Subjects also performed better under conditions of specific rather than general feedback.

Valence

Research findings involving the valence of feedback support that positive feedback has a positive effect on employees'
perceptions of the appraisal process and that people are reluctant to accept or give negative feedback. Dipboye and de Pontbriand (1981) surveyed over 900 scientists, engineers, and technicians involved in research and development concerning their opinions and perceptions of their appraisal process. They found perceived favorability of the appraisal is an important determinant of opinions of the appraisal process. They made several suggestions for increasing the receptivity of employees to negative feedback: allow the employee to participate in the feedback session, discuss plans and objectives, and provide evaluation measures relevant to their work.

Greller (1975a) wrote his doctoral dissertation on the consequences of feedback and found that people seem to selectively use feedback in a manner which allows them to enhance their self-perceptions.

Tesser and Rosen (1975) reviewed a large body of research which demonstrated that people are generally reluctant to provide negative information to a person when the information directly concerns that person. When such negative feedback is given, the feedback is likely to be distorted upward and is likely to be given more quickly and on the basis of a smaller work sample. The research conducted by Larson (1986) with undergraduate university students involving a word puzzle task supported the findings of Tesser and Rosen: Supervisors gave feedback less frequently following subordinate failure; and the negative feedback, when given, was more specific than the feedback they gave about good performance and was distorted to be
less negative. Larson concluded supervisors may often be reluctant to give subordinates negative performance feedback and the reluctance can affect both the content and frequency of the feedback. Fisher (1979) conducted research with undergraduate psychology students, who simulated roles as managers and subordinates. Two findings are of interest concerning feedback valence: (1) Managers gave feedback to poor performers sooner than to good performers (contrary to what was expected); and (2) when subordinates' performance was poor, ratings which were fed back to the performer were significantly higher than those which were not fed back.

Earley (1986) studied the cultural differences between how workers in England and the United States view praise and criticism. He conducted parallel experiments with matched samples of U.S. and English management trainees working for the same multinational corporation to assess the importance of praise or criticism concerning their work performance. Trainees were given verbal praise, criticism, or no feedback by their supervisors, who had been trained in delivering the messages following working through an in-basket simulation exercise. Following the exercise, the subjects completed a questionnaire assessing perceived trust in the supervisor and the perceived importance of praise and criticism. Regression analyses were used to explore whether or not the various types of feedback influenced a worker's performance. The findings were that both praise and criticism worked comparably in improving performance for American workers but only praise increased an English worker's performance. In the same report, Earley described a second study
conducted with English and American workers (and their supervisors) in a more typical work environment. Subjects responded to questionnaire items concerning supervisory praise and criticism. The findings of this study indicated that American and English workers differ in their responses to feedback and that this difference can be predicted using an individual's trust in a source (supervisor) and desire to respond to feedback.

**Consistency**

Research on feedback consistency has involved its relationship with perceived accuracy, self-perceived task competence, and feedback source. D. L. Stone and Stone (1985) conducted experimental research with 90 undergraduate students in personnel management courses at a midwestern university concerning the effects of feedback consistency on perceived feedback accuracy (acceptance) and self-perceived task competence. The following hypotheses were supported: (a) Consistent feedback is perceived as having greater accuracy than inconsistent feedback; (b) the perceived accuracy of feedback increases as a function of favorability; and (c) when inconsistent feedback is provided sequentially by multiple agents (in this instance persons of similar levels of rater expertise, power, and proximity to the recipient), recipients will discount the feedback which is less favorable. The researchers acknowledged that their research design maximized internal validity at the expense of external validity, and they recommended additional research to replicate their findings, emphasizing that such research should be
conducted in actual work organizations. A study by Herold et al. (1987) demonstrated that consistency of feedback and usefulness of feedback are important aspects of source but that these attributes did not alter the ordering of sources in terms of the degree of positiveness with which they were viewed by subordinates. Brickman (1972) conducted research with undergraduate students in an introductory psychology class. He found subjects who received information discrepant with their expectations tended to search for more information those who received information consistent with their expectations.

**Timing**

Research reviewed on the timing of feedback produced inconsistent findings. Alavosius and Sulzer-Asaroff (1986) found that regular and timely feedback improved performance of direct care staff members in a state residential school. Although agreeing, in general, that feedback should be reliable, relatively frequent, and prompt, Berry (1985) cautioned against the computer-based control systems which provide feedback that is so prompt as to create undue pressure on staff. Ilgen et al. (1979) suggested another caution concerning the frequency of feedback: providing frequent feedback which is contingent on behavior may create feelings of being controlled by the source, a situation that is contrary to intrinsic motivation.

In a study involving undergraduate college students assuming the roles of supervisor and subordinate, Fisher (1979) tested the
hypothesis that superiors of low-performing subordinates would wait longer to give feedback than superiors of high-performing subordinates. Contrary to what was expected, the finding was that managers of low-performing subordinates provided feedback after an average of 4.79 weeks, while managers of high performing subordinates waited an average of 6.01 weeks. Subjects' responses to a questionnaire lent support to the position that the reason for the timing of the feedback was a desire to give low performers time to improve their performance before the end of the experiment.

Accuracy

The research on perceived accuracy of feedback has included a variety of independent variables, such as frequency of evaluation, multiple sources compared with single source of feedback, consistency of feedback, and favorableness of feedback. In a study conducted among managerial and professional employees in a large manufacturing organization, which used management by objectives, Landy, Barnes, and Murphy (1978) found that frequency of evaluation, familiarity by the supervisor with the performance levels of the person being evaluated, supervisor agreement with the subordinate on job duties, and setting plans for eliminating subordinate performance weaknesses were process variables which were significantly related to perceptions of fairness and accuracy. Contrary to what was hypothesized, E. F. Stone and Stone (1984) found multiple feedback agents did not have an effect on the perceived accuracy of the feedback, although the variable did have an influence on self-perceived
task competence. In subsequent research, D. L. Stone and Stone (1985) found perceived accuracy of feedback was influenced by feedback consistency and feedback favorability. Research conducted by Arnold (1985) with undergraduate students who volunteered to play a computer game demonstrated that, when accurate feedback is available, levels of task performance will influence perceived competence and attributed causes of performance.

**Integrating the Research on Feedback**

Several researchers have attempted to integrate the research which has been done on feedback in order to more clearly understand how feedback affects behavior in organizations. Ilgen et al. (1979) conducted an extensive review of the literature and developed a model to aid understanding about how an individual processes feedback information. The model includes four processing stages: perception of the feedback, acceptance of the feedback, desire to respond to the feedback, and the intended response. Perception involves how accurately the recipient perceives the feedback; perception is influenced by the source (including credibility and power), the message (including timing, valence, and frequency), and the recipient (issues of locus of control, motivation, and self-esteem). Acceptance refers to the recipient's belief that the feedback is an accurate portrayal of his performance; acceptance is influenced by source credibility, valence of the feedback, specificity, and consistency. Desire to respond involves the recipient's willingness to respond; response is influenced by the recipient's sense of
competence and personal control and the distribution of extrinsic rewards. Intended response deals primarily with the relationship of feedback to goal setting. The authors identified three major issues, or implications for work environments: (1) Feedback is often misperceived or not accepted by the recipient—(a) issues of source credibility and the power relationship cannot be ignored, and (b) specific feedback is less distorted; (2) increasing feedback frequency can have negative results—(a) frequent feedback can connote a loss of control to the recipient, and (b) may lead to reliance on external sources; and (3) individual differences in reactions to feedback must be taken into account—(a) higher order needs and a sense of competence, (b) self-confidence due to past experience, and (c) needs met by rewards and sanctions associated with feedback.

Drawing upon the work of Ilgen et al. (1979), Walther and Taylor (1983) integrated the research on feedback into a practical plan which can be used by managers in providing effective feedback to their employees. The authors defined effective feedback as that which "influences the job-related performance of subordinates" (p. 108). Walther and Taylor offered the following six axioms to guide the manager in providing feedback:

1. Specificity: Feedback must be on specific aspects of the employee's performance.
2. Consistency: Feedback should not vary unpredictably between overwhelming praise and harsh criticism.
3. Timing: Feedback should be given as soon as possible after a specific event.

4. Sign: Feedback should include both positive and negative information so the employee is able to correct problem behaviors but is not overwhelmed by the impact of the negative information.

5. Credibility: The supervisor must be perceived by the employee as a fair and accurate source of information.

6. Accuracy: Feedback must be free of personal bias and be based on accurate information or it will not be accepted by the employee.

Feedback Research in Higher Education

Only three studies were found concerning feedback and staff performance which were conducted in a higher education setting, exclusive of those which used college classrooms as laboratories and students as subjects. One involved survey research conducted by Hanser and Muchinsky (1978) with 387 faculty members at a midwestern university. Subjects were asked to rate five sources of information as to their informativeness in providing referent and appraisal information. The sources of information were: (1) the formal organization, (2) the supervisor, (3) co-workers, (4) the task itself, and (5) personal thoughts and feelings. Referent information was defined as information which tells the worker what is required to function successfully in the job, and appraisal information was defined as information which tells the employee if he is functioning successfully on the job.
A second study concerning performance feedback conducted in a higher education setting was by Dorfman, Stephan, and Loveland (1986). Dorfman et al. investigated the performance appraisal behaviors of supervisors and the reactions of their subordinates. The research involved supervisors attending a 4-hour workshop on rating errors and performance appraisal interview behavior. Follow-up questionnaires were completed by supervisors (to determine their behavior during the appraisal interview) and by their subordinates (to determine the level of satisfaction with their supervisors and the appraisal as well as their motivation to improve job performance). The researchers found: (a) providing support during the interview related to employee satisfaction, and (b) discussing pay and advancement was associated with higher levels of employee satisfaction. The research did not support the conclusion drawn by Meyer, Kay, and French (1965) that the administrative and developmental functions of performance appraisal should be separated.

The only other study conducted on feedback in a higher education setting which was found was done by Cederblom and Lounsbury (1980). The study involved survey research among the faculty at a small southeastern university to determine faculty reactions to the use of peer evaluations. The findings indicated a relatively low degree of acceptance of the practice of peer evaluations. The study was discussed in more detail earlier under the heading, Feedback Source.
Feedback Research and Naturalistic Design

There has been a proliferation of books on the topic of naturalistic research methods in recent years. Interest has grown in the research methodology beyond the academic disciplines typically associated with field research; for example, sociology and anthropology. Concurrently, practitioners in the fields of education, psychology, and organizational psychology have claimed that positivistic research methods have not generated the kind of knowledge about organizations which helps in understanding their richness and complexity (Hackman, 1982, preface). Dissatisfaction has led to more and more researchers in fields with traditional quantitative emphasis (psychology, public administration, and organizational studies) shifting to qualitative research methods (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In spite of the increasing interest in naturalistic research, a computer-generated review of the literature to find examples of studies which employed naturalistic methods in researching questions concerning feedback and staff performance produced limited results. Three naturalistic studies were conducted in K-12 educational systems and concerned supervisory issues, but not specifically performance feedback. Ten studies were found which included both qualitative research and feedback; however, none of them was relevant to studying performance feedback in a higher education setting using qualitative research methods:
1. Five of the studies involved incorporating qualitative methods in program evaluation, one in a state department of transportation, another in a statewide evaluation of early education programs for handicapped children, and three involved program evaluation within a school or district.

2. Three of the studies included providing feedback to students or teachers regarding their performance.

3. One of the projects was a case study which included taped interviews of a first-grade classroom teacher who worked with a number of foreign students.

4. The final study was conducted by Lincoln (1986) at the University of Kansas and involved using qualitative data collection methods to expand the program review process.

None of these studies was reviewed beyond the summaries provided by the computer search.

A computer-generated search of the dissertation abstracts produced 11 studies which concerned feedback and staff performance and 1 study which involved qualitative research, supervision, and education. Upon review of the summaries, none of the dissertations was relevant to studying the nature of feedback on staff performance in a higher education setting.

Investigations in the area of performance feedback can be summarized as follows: (a) Very little research has been conducted in an organizational setting and even less in the specific setting of higher education; (b) most research has been either based on survey data or has used an experimental design or quasi-experimental...
design; (c) almost all research has involved what happens when feedback is either given or withheld. The research on performance feedback has been inadequate to convert theoretical knowledge into widespread practice. Some writers have suggested that, in an effort to ensure internal validity, most researchers conducting studies on performance feedback have used simple tasks and unidimensional aspects of feedback. Thus, the research findings have been difficult to generalize to the complex job situation, where an individual receives feedback from multiple sources in a highly interactive environment.

Considering these limitations of the research on performance feedback, this field study was conducted in a higher education setting in the midwestern United States. The naturalistic research design employed semistructured interviews. Twenty-seven subjects were asked to describe instances of performance feedback, both given and received, and to comment on how the feedback had, or had not, influenced work performance.

The research methodology is described in detail in Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the performance feedback provided to administrative staff in a higher education organizational setting and the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. The study was conducted using a naturalistic design, more specifically, semistructured interviewing. The interviews were focused to elicit information concerning two general questions: (1) What is the nature of the feedback that occurs for administrative staff in a higher education setting? (2) What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff? This chapter, which describes the research procedures that were used to study these questions, is divided into five parts: (1) Rationale for Selection of a Naturalistic Design, (2) Research Design, (3) Data Collection, (4) Data Analysis, and (5) Issues of Trustworthiness.

Rationale for Selection of a Naturalistic Design

Most of the research on performance feedback has been based either on survey data or has used an experimental or quasi-experimental design. The use of ex post facto survey designs has limited the richness of data collection because surveys do not provide for interaction between the researcher and those studied. The
reliance on experimental designs has resulted in feedback being treated simplistically. Some writers (Greller & Herold, 1975; Herold & Parsons, 1985) have suggested that, in an effort to ensure internal validity, most researchers conducting studies on performance feedback have used simple tasks and unidimensional aspects of feedback. A large body of research exists which relates one or two dimensions of feedback to a given response (or set of responses) with little concern for the intermediate psychological processes triggered by the feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Not surprisingly, then, the research findings have been difficult to generalize to the complex job situation, where an individual receives feedback from multiple sources in a highly interactive environment.

In contrast, a naturalistic research design is especially well suited to the study of a complex phenomenon such as feedback. Support for this position can be found in Barker (1968), who defined the term ecological psychology as being concerned with both the psychological environment (the world as a particular person perceives it and is otherwise affected by it) and the ecological environment (the real-life settings within which people behave). Barker concluded that the lack of ecological data limits the discovery of some of the laws of behavior. "It is impossible to create in the laboratory the frequency, duration, scope, complexity, and magnitude of some important human conditions" (p. 3). The research questions that have been identified regarding performance feedback can best be studied in a natural setting where manipulation and artificial restrictions by an investigator are not placed upon the subjects.
The research on performance feedback has been inadequate to convert theoretical knowledge into widespread practice. Howard (1985) attempted to provide an explanation for the gap between theory and practice as he answered the question: Can research in the human sciences become more relevant to practice? He referenced the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy in General Systems Theory, who stated that "the whole influences the action of the constituent parts in such a way that the parts could act in quite a different manner than if they were members of a different whole" (p. 539). Howard also referred to the position taken by Joseph Rychlak that perhaps practitioners ignore research findings in psychology because they are largely irrelevant to practice, the lack of relevancy being directly related to the researchers' adherence to classical experimental research and unwillingness to consider the telic (purposive) nature of human beings. A similar position was expressed by Rist in his "Forward" to Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods: "We as human beings are more than simply the sum total of psychological measures, survey instrument responses, and bits of data on a laboratory checklist" (p. x). Paraphrasing the authors of that text: The work of the qualitative researcher is not to arrive at one definition of feedback, but to present the multiple realities of the word, rather than a single reality (p. 38).

In describing a rationale for choosing naturalistic research methods, Willems (1969) presented several conditions under which naturalistic methods might be preferred. At least two of these
conditions are relevant to the research objectives for this study: (1) when the question involves determining what kinds of behavioral achievements persons make when left to their own resources, and (2) if the question has to do with the distribution of a phenomenon in the everyday lives of people.

Considering these circumstances, the researcher determined that a research design which took a holistic approach and was conducted in an organizational setting could lead to new understandings about the concept of feedback. These understandings could then bring theory and practice regarding feedback and performance in a higher education setting into closer alignment. Furthermore, a heuristic form of phenomenological inquiry, one that built on the personal experience and insights of the researcher and where the researcher was intensely interested and immersed in the research (Patton, 1990), could add to the credibility of the study.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the feedback provided to administrative staff in a higher education organizational setting and the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. The feedback that was examined was that provided by supervisors (generally department heads) and their subordinate administrative staff. The medium for data collection was semistructured interviewing.

In studying the nature of feedback and its relationship to performance, the researcher asked those interviewed to describe
instances of performance feedback, both given and received, and to comment on how the feedback did, or did not, influence job performance. A preliminary set of more specific questions to pursue during the interviews was identified in order to elicit data from the subjects relevant to the broader research questions. These questions, which are presented below, provided structure to the interviews and allowed comparisons across subjects to be made.

**Research Question 1:** What is the general nature of the feedback that occurs in a higher education setting?

1. How much and what kinds of feedback do staff receive? Is it enough?
2. From what sources and under what circumstances do staff receive feedback?
3. Under what circumstances do supervisors give feedback?
4. Do supervisors provide feedback with planned intent or is the giving of feedback incidental?
5. Do staff seek feedback and how?
6. What are the barriers to staff seeking feedback?
7. What are the barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

**Research Question 2:** What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff?

8. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback?
9. What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?
10. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?
Setting

An institution of higher education was chosen for this study because it belongs to a special class of organizations which has not been extensively studied in the literature on performance feedback. Only three studies were found that involved performance feedback in a higher education setting.

The site for this naturalistic study was a small midwestern coeducational public university located in a rural setting. The focus of the university is undergraduate education; only one master's degree program is offered. The university has experienced continuous growth to its present enrollment of approximately 3,500 students and 120 full-time faculty members. Curricular offerings include programs in the liberal arts, preprofessional programs, and technical education; and certificate, associate, and bachelor's degrees are awarded. The institution is accredited by the North Central Association.

Sample Selection

The organization has multiple levels of administrative staff and has sufficient employees at each level to provide an adequate number of subjects for the study. (The available pool consisted of 7 academic department heads, 14 administrative department heads, and 19 subordinate administrative staff. Faculty members, clerical, custodial, and other support staff were not included in the sample.) All functional areas typically associated with a comprehensive,
undergraduate institution of higher education are represented. These functional areas, however, report through two vice presidents and an executive assistant to the president in a somewhat atypical fashion: (a) academic affairs; (b) information services and budgeting; and (c) finance, student services, and athletics. The faculty and some support staff are unionized, while academic department heads and administrative staff are not. The institution also has a structured program for job classification. While the intent of the research was to encompass all kinds of performance feedback, it is interesting to note that at this particular institution formal performance appraisal forms are expected to be completed annually for every employee group.

The researcher intended to interview about 10 administrative employees, including those who supervised other administrative staff and those who did not. The original plan, however, was revised when the researcher learned that the executive vice president had written to all members of the subject pool indicating that they would be contacted by the researcher. Rather than risk that employees would be offended if they were not asked to participate, all 40 members of the pool were contacted. Of those invited to participate, 27 subjects were interviewed. Of the 13 who did not participate, 6 were either on leave or had job commitments that interfered with their participation, and 7 expressed reluctance to participate. A review of those who declined to participate showed no unique characteristics. The researcher found that the sample was adequate to result
in a saturation of categories of data; that is, the last few inter-
views conducted produced little or no new information.

Gaining Entry

The researcher enlisted the support of the president and one of
the vice presidents at her place of employment to introduce her to
their counterparts at the institution to be studied. These linkages
proved to be very useful to gaining entry to the site. The presi-
dent of the institution studied indicated his support early in the
process and called the researcher midway through the gathering of
data to ask if he could be of further assistance. The executive
vice president lent credibility to the research by writing to all
persons in the employee groups planned for inclusion in the study.
The researcher had not met the subjects, nor did she have any per-
sonal knowledge of them, prior to the telephone calls made to sched-
ule the interviews, except for one subject whom the researcher had
met once at a professional conference.

Acceptance of Researcher's Role

As a member of the administrative staff at another public uni-
versity in the same state, the researcher has general knowledge
about organizational structure and staff roles in higher education.
This knowledge contributed to the researcher being able to question
and to respond appropriately and empathically to interviewees. A
second factor that may have contributed to the excellent subject
participation rate is that the institution's mission is primarily
undergraduate education, and staff are rarely, if ever, asked to be subjects of research projects. The novelty of being asked to participate in a research study may have contributed to the subjects responding positively when asked. Furthermore, the potential value of the research findings to the institution and, in particular, to the administrative staff is obvious. This was evidenced by several subjects who thanked the researcher during the interview for the opportunity to discuss the subject of performance feedback and by the number of subjects who indicated that they would be willing to participate in subsequent interviews or follow-up contacts by the researcher.

**Research Methodology**

Semistructured interviewing was an appropriate research technique for the study. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the purposes for doing an interview include "obtaining here-and-now constructions of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities . . . [and] reconstructions of such entities as experienced in the past" (p. 268). Similarly, Gorden (1980) maintained that the interview is valuable when the researcher is "interested in knowing people's beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, or any other subjective orientations or mental content" (p. 11). The in-depth or nonstructured interview has been defined by several qualitative research experts as a conversation with a purpose (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Gorden, 1980; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).
A semistructured interview (or moderately structured, according to Gorden, 1980) is a term used to describe an interview that falls between the rigidly structured, not to be diverged from script and the completely open-ended interview. The interview medium facilitated the gathering of a large amount of data in the setting. The interactive nature of the process also allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and request clarification of responses as needed. Although interview guides were used in order to elicit certain information from all subjects, the researcher took the latitude to pursue any information relative to performance feedback that emerged during the interviews. If the researcher had controlled the process through a more highly structured interview protocol, the richness of the data would have been more limited potentially and the research design may have moved out of the qualitative range of interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

In preparation for the interview sessions, the researcher discussed the relative advantages and disadvantages of different months, weeks, and days for the campus interviews with the secretary to the executive vice president. With her counsel, 1 week was selected in June and 1 week in July, with 3 days each week scheduled for interviews. The researcher scheduled these interviews by telephone.

A letter of invitation and a Consent to Participate Form (see Appendix A) were mailed to the 40 members of the subject pool (and the 3 division heads for their information) early in June, immediately after approvals to conduct the research were received from
Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, and the institution at which the research was to be conducted (see Appendix D). The letter and consent form fully explained the nature of the project and included all pertinent items recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), that is, name, address, and telephone number of the researcher; a statement of purpose of the study and how information would be used; matters of confidentiality, access to data, and withdrawing from the study; and a sign-off space and date for the subject to acknowledge having read and accepted the previous stipulations.

In preparation for the interviews, the researcher developed a tentative set of questions and conducted four pilot interviews with administrative staff members at her place of employment. Two were supervisory level staff and two did not supervise other administrative staff. Following the pilot interviews, the researcher discussed the experience with a knowledgeable qualitative researcher. This sharing of insights and approaches to eliciting data was useful in revising the questions for inclusion in the interview guides.

Two interview guides were developed, one to be used when interviewing supervisory staff and the other to be used with those who did not supervise other administrative staff. The interview guides provided a conceptual map of the topics to be covered and a convenient way of tracking the progress of the interview. Although the guide provided a list of questions to be asked and the order in which to ask them, there was great variation in the way interviews unfolded based on the content presented by the subjects. Consistent with the use of an interview guide, as described by Patton (1990),
the interviewer digressed from the guide, freely exploring, probing, and asking questions to clarify or expand upon a particular comment or idea. (See Appendix A for copies of the interview guides.)

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with 14 supervisors and 13 nonsupervisory staff. Consistent with Burgess's (1984) finding that 1.5-hour time blocks provided the optimum amount of time for interviews, all subjects were asked to schedule this amount of time with the interviewer. All interviews were conducted on site. The executive vice president arranged for the use of a conference room located on the second floor of the administrative building. The conference room was very adequate in size, location, air quality, sound containment, and contained comfortable furnishings. A telephone provided a means for the researcher to remind subjects of their interviews and to follow up the few times that subjects were late in arriving.

The researcher spent a few minutes talking with each participant before turning the tape recorder on and beginning the interview. Typically, the conversation began with an exchange of greetings, the researcher thanking the person for participating, an explanation of how the interview would proceed, and an opportunity offered to the subject to ask any questions. This ice-breaking segment usually ended with the researcher asking the subject if he or she was ready to begin.

When in doubt whether to interview a subject as a supervisor or a subordinate, the researcher consulted the subject before deciding which of the interview guides to use. Since all supervisors who
were interviewed were also subordinate to another level of supervisory staff, when time permitted they were asked some of the questions from the subordinate interview guide.

Data Collection

All interviews were recorded using an audio cassette tape recorder and table microphone. For the most part, the interviews were recorded adequately; however, for two interviews, segments were lost. In one case, the tape reached the end without being noticed. In the other, the interview was recorded over a portion of another session. Since notes were taken during the interviews, it was possible to summarize the segments of the transcripts that were missing. In two instances, subjects asked that the tape recorder be turned off for a portion of the interview. The information shared during the times that the tape recorder was nonoperative was not included in the data analysis.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, including indications of laughter, long pauses, word fillers and interrupters, and poor or incorrect use of language. This is consistent with the position taken by recognized qualitative research experts (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990) that since the data to be analyzed in qualitative research are the words, phrases, statements, etc. spoken by the subjects during the interviews, verbatim transcripts need to be prepared before data analysis can begin. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and by a paid clerical person. All transcriptions were then reviewed by the researcher. When a section
of transcription did not make sense or seemed to be erroneous, that section was checked against the tape recording. A notation was made in the transcription when a word or words could not be understood clearly.

Although not part of the initial plan, the transcriptions were mailed to the subjects along with a cover letter and a brief questionnaire to collect background information on the subjects; that is, years employed by the current institution, years in current position, total years of administrative experience, position held previous to current position, highest degree earned, number of staff supervised, and age. (See Appendix A.) In the letter, subjects were asked to review the transcription, to note any inaccuracies, and to add any information that may have occurred to them since the interview. In the two cases where segments of the transcript were missing, the researcher explained what had occurred and asked the subjects to add to the summary wherever possible.

Any references to names in the interviews were removed and replaced with letter identifiers. Although the transcripts contained content that easily identified individuals, the content was not altered to provide anonymity for the subjects. In the cover letter mailed with the completed transcripts, an explanation was provided that the adjustment was not made because the instances were frequent and such that the revised text would not have made sense. Subjects were reassured, however, that the transcripts would not be seen by anyone other than the researcher, the clerical person hired to transcribe them, and the members of her doctoral committee.
Subjects were further reassured that any quotations used in the written report of the research would not include information that would identify the person speaking. As an additional means of protecting subjects' anonymity, all references in the quoted or paraphrased material to gender have been converted to the masculine form.

Of the transcripts and questionnaires mailed, eight were completed and returned without comments on the transcripts, eight were returned with some comment or correction, two returned only the questionnaire, and nine did not respond. The comments and corrections provided by the eight subjects did not substantively alter the content of the interviews. Changes tended to either reflect a desire to correct incorrect language use and grammatical construction or to fill in words that were missing because of poor recording quality. The researcher contacted the nine nonrespondents by telephone and obtained the missing questionnaire data.

Data Analysis

Transcription of the interviews began following the first set of interviews and continued for several months following completion of the last interview. Since there are no widely accepted set of rules for analyzing qualitative data, the decision was made to follow the guidelines advocated by Miles and Huberman (1984). The actual steps followed are summarized below.

1. Interview transcripts were first read by the researcher when she reviewed them for transcription errors. Prior to
developing a set of initial data codes, the transcripts were read twice more and reflected upon.

2. Considering both the research questions and the data, an initial set of code words was identified. The set of code words was revised during the process of coding as the researcher encountered important data that did not appear to fit under one of the existing code words. The code words and their operational definitions are included in Appendix A.

3. Using Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988), which is a software specifically developed for analysis of qualitative data, all transcripts were reviewed and code words were assigned to chunks of data. The unit of analysis at times was a single sentence and at others several sentences or even several pages. Numerous units of data were given multiple codes, while some segments were judged to be inconsequential and were not coded.

4. Coded segments were printed by code word in two groupings, supervisors and subordinates.

5. Coded segments were grouped according to which of the research questions they addressed. (See Appendix A.) The grouped data were then reviewed in units, each question in turn, and any themes, absences of content, possible connections between concepts, insights, and questions were noted in the margins of the printed copy.

6. Narrative descriptions and matrices were developed to summarize the data by research question.
Issues of Trustworthiness

Within the positivist paradigm, the basic issue of trustworthiness (How can the researcher convince the audience that the findings are worthy of attention?) is addressed by demonstrating that the research has internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Trustworthiness, in the naturalistic paradigm, is addressed by demonstrating that the research findings have credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Matters of trustworthiness were addressed in several ways. Credibility was addressed through member checks of the accuracy of the transcripts and by the use of multiple sources of data. (Twenty-seven subjects were interviewed.) In addition, credibility of data and interpretations of data were provided through judicious, yet representative, inclusion of direct testimony of the subjects.

Transferability was addressed by providing a thick description of the research so that others who may be interested in applying the research findings to new situations will be able to make intelligent decisions regarding its applicability to other settings. In addition, a reflexive journal, including a time schedule, logistics, personal reflections, and a methodological log was kept and is included in Appendix A. During the interviews and immediately following them, the researcher made notes of questions, observations, and insights, including any unusual behavior on the part of the interviewee, the interviewer's own role during the interview, pre- or
postinterview conversations, and any other reflections or ideas judged to be potentially useful during data analysis and interpretation. These notes are included in the journal. The reflexive journal is a means of addressing all four aspects of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
CHAPTER IV

THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the performance feedback provided to administrative staff in a higher education organizational setting and the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. Data were collected using a qualitative research design, which involved semistructured interviews. In this chapter, the findings are presented. The chapter is divided into four sections: (1) Presenting the Findings, (2) The Nature of the Feedback That Occurred, (3) The Relationship Between Feedback and Performance, and (4) Summary of the Findings.

Following the plan outlined in the interview guide, the researcher began by requesting subordinate staff to "Tell me what you do here at this institution." If the response to this question did not result in a thorough description of job responsibilities, subordinate staff were asked: "Would you describe for me what a typical workday is like for you?" The researcher then summarized the major job responsibilities she heard and confirmed them with the subject. Subjects were then asked: "How do you know how you're doing in regard to [in turn, each of the job responsibilities described]?

Similarly, supervisory staff were asked to respond to several general questions; that is, "Would you tell me about your job at this institution? Can you think of instances that occurred this
week when you worked closely with any of your staff?" When inter-
view time permitted, supervisors were also asked how they knew how
they were doing their jobs.

Subjects' responses to these general questions, and several
more specific follow-up questions, provided information concerning
the two broad research questions and their subordinate components.

Research Question 1: What is the general nature of the feed-
back that occurs in a higher education setting?

1. How much and what kinds of feedback do staff receive? Is it enough?

2. From what sources and under what circumstances do staff receive feedback?

3. Under what circumstances do supervisors give feedback?

4. Do supervisors provide feedback with planned intent or is the giving of feedback incidental?

5. Do staff seek feedback and how?

6. What are the barriers to staff seeking feedback?

7. What are the barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff?

8. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback?

9. What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?

10. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?
Presenting the Findings

Initially, the data were analyzed under the 10 research questions identified in the research plan. The researcher concluded, however, that grouping the data and findings in this way resulted in considerable redundancy in regard to the first broad research question. The seven subordinate questions under this section (What is the nature of the feedback that occurs in a higher education setting?) were collapsed, therefore, into the following three subordinate questions:

1. Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?
2. Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?
3. Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

In presenting the findings, three levels of data are used: frequency counts, direct quotations from subjects' interviews, and interpretations of the data made by the researcher. The reader is referred to Appendix B, Chapter IV Raw and Interpreted Data for supportive detail concerning the researcher's interpretations of data. (The detail in Appendix B includes both raw data [direct quotations] and coded data [data judged by the researcher to "fit" a particular data category]. Some of the data included in Appendix B are specifically referred to in the text; other data are provided as supplemental.)
In order to protect the anonymity of the subjects, the researcher sometimes found it necessary to remove a word or words from directly quoted material. When this was done, words of less specific reference were substituted by the researcher; such substitutions have been placed within brackets [ ]. The reader is also reminded that all references to gender, with one exception (the section titled Self-Doubt), have been converted to the masculine form as an additional means of protecting subjects' anonymity.

Organizationally, the findings are presented under two major sections, each representing one of the two broad research questions that were investigated:

1. What is the general nature of the feedback that occurs in a higher education setting?
2. What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff?

Each major section begins with a summary of the general findings concerning the three subordinate research questions identified under the broader question. The section continues with a more detailed discussion of the findings concerning each subordinate question.

The Nature of the Feedback That Occurred

This section includes a discussion of the nature of the feedback which occurred at the research institution. The findings concerning the nature of the feedback which occurred are organized under three subordinate research questions:
1. Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?

2. Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

3. Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

A Summary of the Nature of the Feedback That Occurred at the Institution

The circumstances under which subordinate and supervisory staff reported that they received performance related information were both planned (feedback obtained through the formal evaluation process and through written evaluation questionnaires) and fortuitous (feedback obtained regarding one's performance incidentally through the ongoing process of doing one's job). Consistent with the literature on performance feedback, staff received feedback primarily from six sources: (1) the formal organization, (2) co-workers, (3) supervisors, (4) the task itself, (5) one's own feelings, and (6) clients. The majority of the specific examples relayed by supervisors involved providing corrective feedback. Similarly, the examples provided by subordinates of the ongoing feedback they received involved the sharing of complaints. While supervisors perceived that their subordinates received enough performance feedback, subordinates perceived that the feedback they received was insufficient.
Another aspect of the nature of the feedback that occurred at the institution relates to the behaviors of supervisors in their role of feedback providers. Supervisors were prompted to provide feedback to their staff to fulfill one or more perceived supervisory roles: staff evaluation, staff development, or control of the workflow process. The principal reason supervisors did not provide more performance feedback to their staff was they wanted to avoid the perceived emotional issues associated with doing so.

Although some staff requested input and feedback on the programs for which they were responsible, they rarely engaged in seeking feedback on their own performance. The barriers to staff seeking feedback at the institution seemed to relate to issues of ignorance, self-doubt, pride, disdain, apathy, and lack of trust.

**Research Question 1:** Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?

**Performance Feedback--The Formal Evaluation Process**

The formal evaluation is an especially interesting facet of the performance related feedback available to staff at this institution. The institution has a process in place, with standardized forms, for evaluating staff on an annual basis. Yet, one informant, from the higher administrative rank, spoke rather extensively about the lack of support by his colleagues for the formal evaluation system, even though, as he indicated, this is an expectation of the board of regents. This lack of commitment to completing formal evaluations was a pervasive thread throughout the interviews. Several staff
members stated they had been formally evaluated once during their tenure at the institution and that was the year the board of regents first required formal evaluations to be done. H, a long-term employee, said with dramatic emphasis:

I'll knock you out with this statement: I've never been evaluated . . . and I make humor out of it, so my current statement is: I hope I can get to retirement and never know what I was supposed to do while I was here.

H now has a new supervisor who plans to conduct formal evaluations this year, and he's looking forward to the experience:

Yes, I would like to be evaluated. I think it would be good, if it's done properly, as I feel I do with my subordinates, and there's a good, two-way conversation. I know what's going to happen; I'm gonna hear my strengths and I'm gonna hear my weaknesses, and I can handle that as long as it's done constructively. But having never been through it, I don't know how it's going to go.

Several subjects commented that formal evaluation must be supported "at the top" if there's ever going to be more widespread and consistent use of the institution's stated process. This perception was supported by the findings of the interviewer, in that the commitment of the cabinet-level administrator (reports directly to the president) appeared to be key in whether or not annual evaluations were conducted in that division. That one cabinet-level administrator is a strong supporter of formal evaluation was obvious to the researcher based on the interviews of those department heads who report to him. These department heads were able to discuss performance evaluation from the perspective of both supervisor and subordinate, and each conducts annual performance evaluations for his subordinate staff. Equally obvious was the lack of support for formal
evaluation by another cabinet-level administrator. Not only does he not formally evaluate the employees who report to him, but only about half of his supervisory department heads conduct formal evaluations. Not surprisingly, one of his subordinates, AA, stated it wasn't that he [AA] didn't want to do them [formal evaluations]; he just doesn't give them "as high a priority as some of the other pressures" he has. The third division was not as well represented by those who were interviewed. The three administrators from that division who were interviewed, however, seemed very satisfied with the formal evaluation process. They sit down with their supervisor and develop goals at the beginning of the year and agree upon performance measures. Usually they have a formal meeting at mid-year to discuss progress toward goal achievement and again at the end of the year when the formal evaluation form is completed.

The feelings expressed by the subjects about formal evaluation are not easily synthesized, as staff expressed a lot of ambivalence. The differences of opinion regarding formal evaluation do not exist only between those who do them and those who do not. In some cases, those who do them don't really see their value, but do them because it's expected. On the other hand, at least two supervisors who don't do them consistently expressed strong statements in support of formal evaluation.

Supervisory staff who do not employ the formal process usually stated one of three rationales for their position: the upper administration does not support it, evaluation is not tied to salary (merit pay), and evaluation should be ongoing. One staff member was
of the opinion that "the low man on the totem pole always is evaluated, whereas the top people are not." Another administrative department head expressed his belief that evaluation should be ongoing. "When I see a problem, I deal with it. When I see a time for praise, I deal with the praise." He stated he felt no pressure to do the evaluations because his supervisor never asks him if he's done them, nor have his employees ever asked him about them.

Some supervisors who do formal evaluation do so primarily because it's expected of them. As Z explained: "It's a necessary experience and, for the most part, it's positive. . . . You feel better about the fact that you've addressed them . . . at least all of the chips are out on the table." Another staff member, who stated his secretaries would be disappointed if evaluations weren't done, acknowledged he does them because it's expected, not that he views them as "totally important. There's really nothing that's new, particularly, at that point. So it's really not of that much value."

Although many who used the formal evaluation process did not speak enthusiastically about it, there were several supervisors and several subordinates who were strong advocates. In addition, there were several staff who were not usually formally evaluated who wanted to be. Y indicated he has not been evaluated more than twice in 15 years and stated: "I wish it would happen more often. . . . It forces you to set your own goals, and it forces you to try to meet your goals." And yet, Y went on to say: "I'm probably one of the worst offenders on it, ya know, not doing it for the secretaries." (Another indication of the ambivalence on this subject.)
W, who has been employed more than 20 years with the institution, said: "I've never had a formal evaluation interview since I've been here. . . . And sometimes you wonder whether you are [performing well]. You may be performing well, but you wonder whether you're performing [the right things for the university]."

In spite of the expectation set by the board of regents 3 years earlier that formal evaluations would be conducted at the research institution, there are a large number of staff who are either not evaluated or who receive only the most perfunctory evaluation. Of the 14 supervisors interviewed, 11 conduct annual evaluations; however, only 5 of the 14 are formally evaluated themselves. Of the 13 subordinate staff interviewed, 11 are not formally evaluated. (Several were evaluated once, the first year formal evaluation was required by the board of regents, and 2 indicated they were scheduled for evaluations within the next few months.)

Subject U, who is in a position to be very aware of the institution's culture, provided a succinct description of the situation.

I think that most performance evaluation is pretty much nonexistent. It pretty much depends on how much it's emphasized. If it's not pushed from the top down, it's not going to happen. It doesn't come from the bottom up. And, if you're in one of those work settings like it is here, where some do and some don't, and so there's no great expectation. So, if there's no great expectation, you're not disappointed when it doesn't happen.

Performance Feedback--The Ongoing Process

In addition to the planned performance feedback staff received during the annual formal evaluation, considerable feedback occurred
for staff more fortuitously and throughout the year. For example, much of the performance feedback described by staff was generated from the work flow process and was incidental to the accomplishment of the task. Staff were given (or set for themselves) deadlines and processing guidelines, and they monitored their accomplishment of them. Computer programs signaled staff when they attempted to enter data incorrectly. Monthly reports from one unit were reconciled with those of another unit. Reports, which reflected on the performance of staff, were filed by people external to the institution; for example, auditors, federal and state agencies, and accrediting bodies. Staff were required to maintain (or maintained on their own volition) enrollment and attendance figures and records of revenues and expenditures.

Another form of ongoing, but less fortuitous, feedback reported by staff was initiated by other people (students, other staff, or people external to the university). Some of the feedback was of the "feel good" type; that is, it generally expressed appreciation for services received, but did not provide much information specific to an individual's performance. In contrast, complaints usually related very specific incidents. Some came to the staff member's attention directly and some through another party, and in either written or verbal format. When feedback was conveyed through a third party, the vehicle was frequently the supervisor, and the feedback was relayed in a variety of ways; that is, scheduled appointments, informal visits, telephone calls, and notes.
Subjects, on the other hand, also reported taking deliberate steps to generate program or staff feedback. Much of performance-specific information was solicited in the form of student evaluations, either of instruction or administrative department program offerings (residence halls, activity programs, commencement activities, orientation, etc.). Others held "post mortem" sessions following the delivery of a program in order to obtain recommendations for how the program could be improved. (A summary of the circumstances by which staff became aware of performance related information is presented in Appendix B under two headings: (1) Types of Feedback Received by Subordinates and (2) Sources of Feedback for Subordinate Staff and the Circumstances by Which They Become Aware.)

Source

Staff at the research institution received information about how they're doing their jobs from a variety of sources. Consistent with the literature on sources of performance feedback available in the work environment, they reported sources of feedback under each of the five categories identified by Greller and Herold (1975) and a sixth category identified by Herold et al., (1987):

1. The formal organization--pay raises, promotion, and communication from higher level administrators and members of the board of regents.

2. Co-workers--staff from within the same work unit and those from other departments with whom they have frequent interactions,
including feedback obtained through the "grapevine."

3. **Supervisors**--the person (or in some cases persons) to whom the staff member reports administratively; also for those who supervise, feedback from subordinate staff.

4. **The task itself**--information received from performing a work task without another person being the provider of the information, including hard data (e.g., enrollment numbers, revenue generated).

5. **One's own feelings and ideas**--one's own methods of monitoring work performance, including simply having a "sense" of doing a good job.

6. **Clients**--students, alumni, employers, and other faculty and staff for whom services are provided.

In addition, subjects identified several sources which do not fit the six categories detailed in the literature. All of them were external sources that were not client related, that is, auditors' reports, the media, government agencies, and recognition from professional associations.

The relative frequency with which various sources of performance feedback were mentioned by staff, by category, is summarized in Table 1. (See Appendix B, Source of Feedback by Subject, for detail concerning the sources of feedback reported by staff and their assignment by the researcher to one of seven feedback categories.)

Co-workers were the source of performance feedback most frequently mentioned by the 19 subjects who commented on the topic.
Table 1
Source of Feedback by Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Subordinates</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B C D E H J K O P U V W Y</td>
<td>I M N RR S AA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal organization</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors/subordinates</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task itself</td>
<td>X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>X X X X X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(16), with supervisors a close second (15). The least frequently mentioned source was self.

Positive Reinforcement Versus Corrective Feedback

Based on the incidents related by those interviewed, supervisors at the institution clearly did not give as much attention to positively reinforcing the behavior of their subordinates as they did to providing corrective feedback. A positive work environment for most subordinate staff was the "absence of complaints." Several supervisors recognized the importance of increasing positive feedback. One supervisor recognized that particularly his younger staff
needed to hear more praise from him.

They tend to think that their work has gone unnoticed; that their boss doesn't care. So I've been trying to get back at least once a day and to create some type of small process . . . so they know who I am and that it's not beneath me to go up to the [work area], strike up a conversation with them, and to give the praise deserved.

The saddest commentary on the absence of positive reinforcement in the work environment was provided by a subject who stated he didn't wonder how his performance was perceived, nor did he want more information. He described his supervisor's style as: "I think his way is (pause), his way is, if you're not doing a good job, he'll call up and tell you." The subject's supervisor provides direction (establishes procedures and deadlines), checks in regularly to see how things are going, and lets staff know whenever there's a problem. The supervisor does not do annual performance evaluations on his staff. In spite of expressing satisfaction with the status quo, however, the subject provided the following:

We used to put a hand on the wall, and if you wanted a pat on the back, you'd go up and lean against it, ya know. . . . We used to have a gold star. If anybody wanted a gold star, it was always sticking on the wall. You could stick it on, because that's the way, that's the way it is.

Although the work unit described above appears to be functioning adequately (deadlines are met and few errors are made), there appears to be a hunger for positive feedback. Apparently, even for productive employees--good performers--being told one is doing a good job still matters.
Enough Feedback?

Feedback for Subordinates. Subordinates were asked: "Do you receive enough information about how you're doing your job?" Of the 13 subordinate staff interviewed, 7 said they received enough performance related information. Of this group, however, two of the affirmative responses were said somewhat hesitantly, and one person added the qualifier that he would like to have a formal evaluation. (More detailed descriptions of subordinates' responses are presented in Appendix B, Enough Performance Feedback--Subordinates.)

Supervisors were asked: "Do you think that your staff receive enough information about how they're doing their jobs?" Generally, supervisors felt their staff received enough feedback on their performance. Several supervisors stressed the availability of task related information for their staff. One supervisor commented extensively on the lack of processing error in his department and "the fact that there is very little complaints" as being an important means for his staff to know how they're doing. Another stressed that "completing certain tasks by certain deadlines" and the reviews which occur through government audits are indications to staff of how they're performing. Yet another stressed his use of specific data based productivity measures as a way of identifying staff members who may have performance problems.

In view of the discrepancy between subordinates' and supervisors' perceptions regarding the adequacy of performance feedback for subordinate staff, it would have been interesting to compare the
response of a subordinate with the response of his supervisor. Unfortunately, a matched comparison between the two cannot be made, because there are only two instances where both parts of the reporting line were interviewed. For these two reporting lines, the following was found: Although both supervisors felt their staff received enough performance feedback, more than 50% of their staff did not agree.

Feedback for Supervisors as Subordinates. Most supervisors were also asked to comment on whether or not they received enough information about how they were doing [their jobs]? Two supervisors spoke rather eloquently about situations which had provided them with information about their own performance. An academic department head discussed that he learns about how others view his performance through various exchanges with subordinates and colleagues. Subordinates will tell him directly if they like or do not like an action taken. He bases the extent to which he is valued by his colleagues by how they listen to his suggestions and ideas. The situation described by an administrative department head was one whereby his supervisor actually toured through facilities with him and asked a number of specific and pointed questions. He seemed to be very impressed, stating "and I'll tell you, I had to do an about face in a hurry, because there are things, the questions he was asking me that I didn't know the answer. . . . I'd gotten away from all of that." This same supervisor, who receives supervision from two persons, expressed frustration that his other supervisor seems
to get information about his operation from a subordinate staff member in an inappropriate way.

Unfortunately, these two examples are not representative of the findings. Q, a supervisor who is not formally evaluated, was definite in his position regarding formal evaluation:

In my case, if I were to be evaluated, yes, I would care. I mean a new job? I don't have a real strong comfort level, so I would care very much. But if I had been with the place for 20 years, and no one had ever paid attention to evaluations before and not even done them, would you care?

Less than 50% of the supervisors interviewed assessed the amount of performance feedback they received as adequate. (Supervisors' assessments of the amount of performance feedback received by them and their subordinate staff are presented in Appendix B, Enough Performance Feedback—Supervisors.)

Research Question 2: Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

The Circumstances Under Which Feedback Occurred

The circumstances under which supervisors provided subordinate staff with feedback appear to be influenced by three role expectations of supervisors described in the management literature: staff evaluation, staff development, and controlling the work flow process. All of the 14 supervisors interviewed understood that the supervisory role includes formal evaluation; and as indicated under the section Performance Feedback--The Formal Evaluation Process, 11
of the 14 supervisors interviewed carried out this function.

At least one academic department head did an exceptional job of providing staff with developmental feedback. For example, I, supplemented the formal process with other feedback initiatives designed to help his faculty members improve their pedagogical skills. In addition to the formal evaluations which I conducted annually for all probationary faculty, adjunct faculty, and clerical staff, he conducted at least three or four classroom visits for each probationary faculty member and discussed a summary of the information with the faculty member soon after the visit. Student evaluations of instruction were compiled each term and the information was shared with the faculty member. I assigned mentors to new faculty members, and he wrote notes and letters of support and appreciation to faculty who completed projects for the department or the university. Professional development discussions were held informally with faculty, serendipitously over a cup of coffee or more deliberately by inviting the faculty member to lunch. I encouraged faculty members to engage in collegial discussions and present material at staff meetings, and he used phone mail to provide complimentary feedback to staff concerning recent accomplishments. Although not as extensive as I's efforts to supplement the formal evaluation process, the other three academic department heads visited classrooms and summarized their visits for their faculty, and with differential frequency held staff meetings, retreats, and individual developmental feedback sessions with members of their staff.
Staff development feedback initiatives, although not limited to academic department heads, occurred much less frequently outside of that group. A few administrative department heads expressed their belief in the importance of staff development and provided ongoing training and encouragement for professional growth. F spoke of "upgrading staff through directions from me and training assistance." N spoke of sitting down frequently throughout the year with his managers "because a lot of my job is counseling, developing young managers to become better managers." AA reported having regular collegial discussions with his staff concerning how best to carry out job functions.

All of the supervisors interviewed clearly saw the supervisory role as including the control function, and all monitored staff performance in some way. Administrative department heads were much more likely to provide feedback to their staff for control purposes (i.e., monitoring the work flow process) than for purposes of staff development. Most of them commented on their close proximity to the staff they supervise and noted they had daily opportunities to observe staff performance. In contrast, academic department heads had more limited opportunities to observe the performance of their staff. The principal means by which academic department heads exercised the control function were classroom observations and student evaluations of instruction.

Some supervisors, from both the academic and administrative ranks, used data to monitor performance and shared the data with their subordinate staff. The data included overall university
enrollment, enrollment in a particular class, attendance at a program, number of errors in processing paperwork, an auditor's report, or the results of an accreditation study.

Based on the incidents related by those interviewed, however, the principal catalyst to the supervisors providing subordinate feedback was a desire to correct a deficiency in the work flow process. Deficiencies came to their attention through their own observation of behavior in the work environment and through their review of work products. A third source of this information, and the predominant source for some, was complaints from student clients, other staff, and people external to the institution. Complaints came in the form of letters, telephone calls, and personal visits; sometimes, they were made by the person who experienced the situation directly or relayed by a second- or third-hand source. Whatever the source of complaints, feedback generally was shared with the subordinate in close proximity to its receipt. A much less frequent catalyst to supervisory feedback was the desire to reinforce positive behaviors by sharing compliments volunteered by others.

Barriers to Supervisors Providing Feedback

Unlike the preceding questions, this question does not ask if something exists; rather, the assumption is made that there are barriers to feedback in the work environment, and the task is to identify what they are. The extensive data which emerged during analysis, however, validated the accuracy of the assumption. An initial analysis of data concerning the barriers to supervisors
providing feedback produced 22 items. Thirteen items were mentioned by one person only, five items were mentioned by two, three items by three, one item by four, and one item by five. The item with the greatest response was time, and the item with the second greatest response was resistance by staff.

Further analysis resulted in the items being collapsed into the following categories: emotional discomfort, lack of confidence in the information upon which to make a judgment, lack of power, it makes no difference, lack of time, lack of supervisory expectation, and other. The barriers in their collapsed form are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Barriers to Supervisory Feedback (by Supervisor)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>I</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional discomfort</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
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<td>Lack of power</td>
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<tr>
<td>It makes no difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
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<td>Lack of supervisory expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Based on the collapsed data, the primary reason supervisors do not provide feedback is they want to avoid the emotional issues with
which it is associated. These emotional issues include the supervisor's own anxiety or discomfort and the anticipation that the recipient will be defensive. Three other barriers were moderately influential, being mentioned four or five times: Supervisors do not have enough information on which to make a performance related judgment, it makes no difference, and lack of time to provide feedback. (For detail, see Appendix B, Barriers to Supervisory Feedback.)

**Research Question 3:** Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

**Feedback-Seeking Behavior**

Toward the latter part of the interview, both supervisory and subordinate staff were asked if they had ever asked anyone to give them feedback on their performance. Their responses to this question, as well as any references throughout the interview to ways in which they sought information about their performance, provided the data analyzed to answer this question. In some cases, supervisors' comments also provided information about how their subordinate staff sought feedback.

Eight of the supervisors could not think of a time when any of their staff had ever sought them out for information about their performance. Three indicated staff on occasion had asked them for information about how they had done regarding a specific project or situation. One academic department head talked about having been invited by some of his faculty to observe them teach. He commented that those who have extended such an invitation have been faculty
"who have a pretty good impression of their abilities." A second academic department head recalled one of his administrative staff, who had been in his position for about a year, had asked him how he was doing and should he be doing anything differently. He was of the opinion that the feedback-seeking behavior was related to being new on the staff. He expressed that he couldn't imagine staff who have been in their positions [for some time] "going out to try to get feedback. They know what their evaluations are." A similar feeling was expressed by an administrative department head who concluded his staff probably wouldn't approach him for such information because "I probably have given them my feelings of how they're performing in that role before they had a desire, had a need, to ask for it." Three supervisors mentioned they ask subordinates for feedback when they conduct their annual evaluations. For two, the feedback solicited is confined to how the supervisor conducted the evaluation; for the third, the feedback solicited is general.

Most of the subordinate staff seemed startled when asked if they had ever asked anyone for information about how they were performing their jobs. Many indicated that such an idea had not occurred to them. Several subjects responded they routinely asked other staff or clients for suggestions, either verbally or in writing, about improving services or programs for which they were responsible, but not for feedback on their own performance. One person expressed abhorrence about the idea of seeking feedback on his performance:
There's one person that does that. Everything that he does he brings it to the boss. "Oh, look what I did." And, everybody in the office resents that person . . . . The person should be proving themselves without having somebody saying you're doing a good job . . . . If he [the boss] has to tell other people that this person is doing a very good job, ya know, when he's saying that everybody else is thinking that person isn't doing a good job.

Only two subjects, one an academic department head and the other an administrator in a subordinate position, showed any enthusiasm for the question. The administrator's approach to seeking feedback was very casual but deliberate: "I've come right out and asked people, very point blank, because I've had some doubts at times on whether I'm headed in the right direction for whatever reason." He was selective in whom he approached, however, "three or four people that I feel very, very close to." He also had asked his supervisor, "How am I doing . . . . What do you think of my job performance so far?" The academic department head had the most extensive response:

I tend to ask him [the academic vice president] a lot for feedback, and I ask him a lot to give me his sense of what else I would, he would like me to do, or what I should be doing differently, or what he has learned that I need to be changing about my behavior. . . . I also solicit his feedback with regard to next steps in my career development. . . . I think that my faculty colleagues give me quite direct feedback about my performance, almost on a daily basis, and when I have questions about it, I go and ask them.

He indicated that he also solicits feedback about his performance from department head colleagues.

Do staff seek feedback? Based on the subjects studied, and answer clearly is: no, they do not. Even those who admitted to wondering how they were perceived as doing their jobs, with one
exception, did not seek feedback on their performance from other people.

**Barriers to Staff Seeking Feedback**

In analyzing the data concerning the barriers to feedback-seeking behavior at the research institution, the researcher was reminded of a book authored by Bogue (1985), *The Enemies of Leadership: Lessons for Leaders in Education*. Bogue explicates 10 impediments to effective leadership in higher education: ignorance, prejudice, apathy, indecision, mediocrity, imitation, arrogance, inefficiency, rigidity, and duplicity. An analysis of the numerous examples shared by staff at this institution seemed to fall within six categories: ignorance, self-doubt, pride, disdain, apathy, and lack of trust. There are some interesting parallels between the impediments to effective leadership described by Bogue and the barriers to seeking feedback described by the subjects interviewed.

**Ignorance.** By far the most pervasive barrier to feedback-seeking behavior was ignorance, ignorance in the sense of lack of awareness. For some staff, certain performance related information was readily available in their work environments, only they did not perceive it as such. C was required to collect information from student clients each term concerning the performance of his staff and students' satisfaction with the services and programs offered. He did not seem to grasp, however, that client feedback on the programs for which he is responsible is a measure of his performance as
the director of the program. E and his staff have been successful in obtaining grant funds and having them renewed year after year. This achievement did not appear to be perceived by E as an indicator of his successful performance. Students seek out J for assistance and "just to share how they're doing." J didn't appear to link this indication of student trust with perceptions of his performance. K and G have a lot of work flow data available to them on a daily basis. Neither discussed using the data as feedback to themselves or their staff on the level of their accomplishments.

Ignorance of knowing what other employees do, and a general lack of sophistication about what they had a right to expect of their supervisors, also seemed to be factors which limited feedback-seeking behavior. B indicated co-workers aren't likely to tell him if he makes a mistake: "No, I don't think anybody really, everybody just kinda does their own job and nobody knows what anybody else does." O expressed he would appreciate the opportunity to meet with other administrators periodically so they could be better informed about each other's operations. Several staff also indicated a desire to know more about the "broader picture"; for example, directions for the institution planned by higher level administration and the services other units expected from them.

Self-Doubt. Statements which seem to relate to lack of confidence or self-doubt were shared by 6 of the 10 female interviewees. Several of their expressions of self-doubt seemed to be linked with how they were treated by their supervisors or by the organization.
One staff member, for example, was obviously dissatisfied with her level of pay and job classification, but had done nothing to try to change the situation. While she said, "I don't expect my boss to go up there and say 'Gee, she's doing such a heck of a job, put her on the top,'" her tone implied that the contrary was true. She also talked about doing some fairly major reports, but "actually, I don't get any credit for it, ya know." And later, "I get a lot of letters [of appreciation], a lot of letters from the students, but nobody ever sees them, except the kids that open my mail." How does her situation affect her? "I'm really an easy-going person, but I really get mad inside."

Other comments seemed to reflect a lack of self-confidence. One female administrator described how she felt sometimes in exchanges with her supervisor. She spoke of calling her supervisor with a concern and hearing the adding machine operating in the background. She interpreted this to mean that what she was saying wasn't perceived by her supervisor as important. Although she has always received top ratings on formal evaluations, she viewed her supervisors as being "overly generous." Regarding working with her colleagues, she expressed sometimes feeling "a little bit out-classed." Another, who is not formally evaluated, wasn't sure if she would want that to happen because "I might really feel bad if he told me I was really not very good at something." A similar sentiment was expressed by another female employee who admitted she couldn't remember much about her last formal evaluation, other than that she was very nervous. Even though her evaluation was quite
positive, she found herself interpreting many of the comments more negatively than she believes her supervisor intended. Only in retrospect was she able to recognize that her evaluation had actually been quite positive.

Self-doubt seemed exacerbated for one female by her supervisor's interference with her work; for example, making decisions which should have been hers to make and actually taking over some of her projects, thus leaving her in a quandary whether that function had been taken away from her. "He'll take some of my jobs and just do them, and so I'm kinda lost as to did I lose that part of my job." In addition, she used to sign all of her own purchase requisitions, and now her supervisor signs everything. (The change in procedure by her boss, which appeared to be an indication of her supervisor's lack of confidence in her ability, may be another example of performance feedback which is not recognized by the staff member.)

On first analysis, it appeared that statements of self-doubt were made almost exclusively by female staff. The exceptions seemed to be a few male staff members who sometimes wondered, in the absence of being formally evaluated, how their job performance was perceived by others and whether the activities in which they engaged were those which the institution wanted them to be doing. Subsequent analysis, however, invalidated this preliminary finding. Statements of self-doubt by males, although stated more subtly perhaps, were more extensive (although significantly less than for females) than originally thought. For example, one male subject
engaged in probing what the researcher had been learning from the interviews. Although the researcher was noncommittal in her responses, the subject was persistent. The questions reflected both an interest in the findings and a desire to disparage the research strategy.

**Pride.** Two male staff members, who expressed satisfaction with the amount of performance related information available to them, felt they were in the best positions to assess their own performance. One indicated, "There's no one at this institution that looks over my shoulder at the yardstick [measures he used to gauge his department's success]. Most of them don't understand what the yardstick is anyway." The second commented:

I know where and how I want to perform, and I probably, with the kind of background I've got, I probably can pick up on where and the kind of reporting that I have to do in the role that I'm in. I can probably pick up on those things where I have screwed up as quicker, or quicker than anybody else.

**Disdain.** One staff member, speaking of the formal evaluation, commented, "It's just a bunch of paperwork, really." In reference to the feedback which is requested of student clients, C said there were times when students questioned when the feedback they provided was used--the implication being it sits in someone's files--and wondered if staff were trying to figure out who wrote those things. He also commented he viewed formal evaluations similarly to his boss, "I hate doing that with my staff." C shared his perception that "people that don't communicate that well with their people tend
to use the formal evaluation." Speaking of a previous supervisor, 0 commented that his attitude was "when I have an evaluation done on me, then I will do it on my employees." Of his current supervisor, 0 indicated, "The only way that he'd [my boss] even know what I'm doing is if I tell him." 0's assessment of the institution's approach to formal evaluation was quite disparaging. He questioned the fairness of a system when, "in some offices the supervisor comes in and says: 'Oh, how are things going? Oh, good. Okay. Continue.' And that's it. While some of us have these pages and pages of goals and objectives that we worked on." 0, one of the supervisors who evaluated his staff, but is not evaluated himself, spoke to the "penalty" for not doing the formal evaluation:

Ya know, I mean they're not gonna fire you. Even if I wrote a bad evaluation on one of my [staff] who's been here [many] years, what's gonna happen to him? Nothing, ya know. Ya know, so it's kind of an exercise in futility, I suppose. But I think it's worthwhile, because at least we'll be marching to the same tune for a year.

Apathy. One subject indicated he wouldn't mind having a formal evaluation "if it wasn't something that was forced on our boss. . . . If he doesn't like it, then he's just checking that stuff off to keep his boss off his back." More than one employee in this reporting line indicated he would like to have a formal evaluation. One even commented he would not be hesitant to tell his supervisor of his desire, but he just hadn't done so. For him and others, not taking action to change the situation appeared to be a matter of being unwilling to take the chance of learning his evaluation might include some lower ratings than he would like. Also
confounding their inaction, perhaps, was a loyalty to their supervisor.

Lack of Trust. There were several segments of data which seemed to indicate staff lacked trust either in their supervisor or the evaluation process. Q seemed to lack trust in his supervisor whose knowledge and experience is limited in the functional areas for which Q is responsible. Furthermore, Q viewed his supervisor's level of educational accomplishment as being inadequate. Another staff member, who recalled filling out a form which might have been the formal evaluation, was not given the courtesy of a private evaluation interview. He was brought in for his evaluation interview with a co-worker. The supervisor indicated that, since the two of them had such similar jobs, he would handle them at the same time.

C recalled his last formal evaluation, which had occurred several years earlier under a previous supervisor, as having been very "distasteful," leaving him skeptical of the evaluation process.

That one sits in my mind very well. It was a complete waste of two hours. My old supervisor continually tore me apart . . . . things that happened eight months ago and weren't brought up until evaluation time. They were never dealt with at the time. If there's a problem, why wasn't I told then?

C went on to say he couldn't even remember the circumstances of the situation referred to by his supervisor, "God did that person really stop by my office that one day and talk to me for three or four minutes about something?"

Contributing to the lack of trust for some staff was the unavailability of their supervisors. In two reporting lines, each
involving at least three subordinates, staff commented on the lack of opportunity to talk over work related concerns with their supervisors. Supervisors' multiple responsibilities and time intensive workload were perceived as impediments to supervisors being knowledgeable about what was happening in their areas. The implication here was that feedback, given by someone who didn't understand one's operation, lacks credibility. In one case, the span of supervisory control was so great that adequate functional supervision is impossible to accomplish.

An analysis of the data concerning the barriers to feedback-seeking behavior by staff did not identify any one predominant factor. There appear, however, to be some interesting relationships among the six barriers which were identified, relationships which may indicate a subsuming reason for the lack of feedback-seeking behavior. Certain aspects of three of the factors (ignorance, self-doubt, and apathy), for example, are employee-centered problems; that is, lack of assertiveness and lack of knowledge, even lack of ability. Two other factors, disdain and lack of trust, point to management-centered problems; that is, staff perceive supervisors as lacking the knowledge to evaluate them and the institution as failing to hold supervisory staff accountable for implementing the formal evaluation system. The seeming acceptance of the situation, as evidenced by the failure of both subordinates and supervisors to act to change the situation, may be reflective of an organizational culture which does not support more aggressive feedback-seeking behavior.
The Relationship Between Feedback and Performance

This section includes a discussion of the relationship between feedback and staff performance at the research institution. The findings are organized under the three subordinate research questions which follow:

4. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback?
5. What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?
6. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?

A Summary of the Relationship Between Feedback and Performance

For the most part, subordinate staff did not perceive that they changed their work behavior as a result of the performance feedback they received. Three kinds of feedback were mentioned by staff as being most useful to them: student feedback, quantitative data, and self. Supervisors perceived that providing feedback to their staff contributed to improved performance. They were pragmatic, however, in regard to their expectations, recognizing that other factors (e.g., an individual's ability and attitude) are part of the feedback environment.

Research Question 4: Do staff change their work behavior as the result of seeking feedback?

Subordinate staff (and supervisors in their subordinate role) were asked to relay instances when they had received information
about how they were doing their jobs and to comment concerning whether or not the information led them to change how or what they had been doing. A few staff provided examples of having changed their work behavior because of task feedback they received. D commented on feedback he received from a staff member regarding an error in a transaction he had processed. The change in behavior described by D concerned correcting an error in a particular record, rather than changing his work performance. D also commented on the value of computer feedback: "You can almost correct it [an error in processing] before you go on. . . . They help you and tell you if you're going off track." Z indicated his supervisor had given him feedback about losing his temper, and the feedback had served as a reminder. Several staff commented on soliciting input on their programs and changing some aspect of delivering the program as a result of the feedback.

Although several supervisors were able to discuss instances of when they perceived a change in subordinate behavior as a result of feedback they had given, examples by subordinates of having changed work behaviors were limited. The data suggest several possible explanations for the dearth of examples: (a) Only two of the subordinates interviewed received formal evaluations, (b) a number of staff mentioned that they were clued they were doing a good job by the absence of information (no complaints), and (c) there were several instances where staff did not perceive available information as feedback on their performance. Furthermore, instances of positive feedback, by their nature, are reinforcing, rather than
prescriptive.

Research Question 5: What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?

Subordinate staff were asked: "When you consider all of the information available to you about how you do your job, which do you find to be the most useful?" In all but two instances, subjects answered the question directly. In two instances, subjects E and O, answers were determined by the researcher, considering the context of the total interview.

Grouping similar responses resulted in six distinct categories: Others don't dislike me (B), student feedback (C, K, O, and Y), absence of complaints (D), quantitative measures (E, J, and W), self (H, P, and U), and comments from other staff as clients (Y). Three kinds of feedback were mentioned as most useful by three or four staff: student feedback, quantitative data, and self. Each of the remaining three categories were mentioned by one person.

The literature on performance feedback is not clear concerning whether or not quantitative information is included under the heading "the task itself." Logically, however, this would be an appropriate alignment. If one considers quantitative data as synonymous with task, then two of the three most useful kinds of feedback reported by staff at this institution are consistent with the literature on performance feedback (Greller & Herold, 1975; Herold et al., 1987); that is, the task itself and one's own feelings and ideas are those most relied upon in the work setting. There is little information in the literature about the relative importance of client
feedback; however, client feedback may be somewhat unique to workers in service organizations.

Interestingly, several sources mentioned frequently by subjects during the course of the interviews are conspicuous by their absence: one's supervisor, the formal evaluation, and the task itself. The lack of reliance on one's supervisor is consistent with the finding of Greller and Herold (1975) that people rely on sources "psychologically closer" (self and task) more than they do upon sources "psychologically distant" (supervisor, co-workers, and formal organization). The lack of reliance on task, however, is discrepant with Greller and Herold's findings. A possible explanation for the inconsistency is subjects may not be able to clearly differentiate between information coming from the task and that which comes from their own thoughts and feelings [self] (Hanser & Muchinsky, 1978). Since 11 of the 13 subordinate staff were not evaluated formally on a regular basis, it is not surprising that formal evaluation was not included among those viewed as useful by staff at this institution. Another possible reason staff did not identify formal evaluation as a useful vehicle for obtaining performance feedback is their assessment that the evaluation interview did not "tell me anything I didn't already know."

Research Question 6: Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?

All 14 supervisors interviewed were of the opinion that performance feedback contributes to improved performance. One administrative department head provided perhaps the strongest statement,
describing performance feedback as key to his being able to accomplish one of his primary roles, that of preparing his staff for career advancement: "It's a 100%. If they didn't have feedback information to them verbally or written format, they would have no sense of where they are, where they're at, or where they need to go to get to the next step." G, an administrative supervisor, who was an especially good informant, expressed with great conviction his commitment to providing feedback to this staff:

I guess I compare what I do with what's done to me, ya know. I, my supervisor very seldom says anything good, bad, or in between; whether you're doing the job well or you're not doing it well, or just satisfactory, and I, I've always felt that it's important to let someone know they're doing something right and proper on a regular basis, and also on the other hand, if something isn't being done properly, I think we need to correct that as soon as possible, too. People don't like to be just taken for granted with their job. I think they need to know that they're doing something that helps you out, and it's important to the institution, the people we serve.

Each supervisor shared at least one example from his own experience of how providing performance feedback led to improved performance. Administrative department heads shared several examples to illustrate the successful outcomes resulting from having provided staff with corrective feedback. In most cases, the behavior was confronted soon after the incident; the approaches taken by the supervisors ranged from very informal to very formal. G described correcting his assistant when he gave erroneous information to a student who came into the office: "I'll just call over the wall [between their offices] and say, 'No, X tell them [this or tell them that].'" A described a situation involving tension between two of
his staff members, which he handled by meeting with both parties in the privacy of his office. A noted: "I haven't had any situations where that has had to bring itself to a written or formal form." Although the problem was resolved, "there was a little bit of distance afterwards, but that was very short lived." G also described a situation involving a staff member making a "serious error" which he handled by writing a formal letter of discipline. The error was not repeated by the disciplined staff member; in fact, G reported the staff member took special care when performing similar tasks.

Three administrative department heads provided descriptions of problems which were addressed successfully by sharing feedback with the staff member during the formal evaluation process. An experience related by G could serve as a textbook example of the positive outcomes which can result from a performance evaluation interview. A staff member who reported to G had been performing about 60% of the tasks assigned to him, and G had reconciled himself to the situation, carrying the extra responsibility himself. Three years prior to the interview, however, when the institution required all supervisors to do performance evaluations, G's evaluation of this staff member resulted in his performing a greater portion of his job description.

But I should point out one thing, though: The result of the one year we did a detailed evaluation, three years ago, kind of opened my eyes, and I had to make some judgments there on performance or whatever. And I, I at that time convinced myself that, gee, I really should be giving him more work to do as far as work that, in regards to the position. And I did, and he had a marked increase in pride in his work, and, and I guess much more comfortable there than he used to be.
The academic department heads spent considerable time during their interviews talking about how they use student evaluation of instruction and their own classroom observations in the evaluation process. Acknowledging that these processes require a major amount of their time, they nevertheless talked about plans they had for increasing their effectiveness in using these means to improve faculty performance. Academic department heads usually obtained information about how their faculty performed from three sources: the written evaluations of instruction provided by students each semester, student complaints, and the department head's own observations of faculty teaching. The department heads discussed students' evaluations with the faculty member as part of the formal evaluation process. If the student evaluations pointed to performance deficiencies, strategies for improvement were identified with the instructor. Subsequent student evaluations provided the means for determining if the problems had been sufficiently addressed. Department heads expressed satisfaction concerning the exchanges they had with faculty when discussing the student evaluations. Usually they described the exchange as very collegial and focused on pedagogical strategies.

Providing performance feedback did not always result in improved performance, and supervisors seemed to be very pragmatic concerning their expectations in this regard. In describing how he had coached a faculty member about whom students frequently complained, said:
I know that I have an effect. I can't say that I have an effect every time. I suspect that I don't. I can't say that I always know when I have an effect. But I know that I sometimes, I do have some successes with him.

I seemed to express most eloquently the pragmatism of several of his peers:

I also understand that because people are aware that there is a problem does not mean that they can change their behavior or know how to do that. Therefore, I don't think that just bringing problems to people's attention guarantees in any sense of the word there's going to be a change. On the other hand, denial or lack of attention to the problems doesn't make them any better either.

The detailed experiences related by both administrative and academic department heads tended to concern problem performers, rather than a single incident. In two instances, the feedback provided by the supervisor was reported as having contributed to improved performances. In three instances, the employee did not continue in the position. In all three cases, supervisors reported having invested considerable time and psychological energy in order to improve the employee's performance. As the supervisors relayed their experiences, they conveyed their own frustration and, perhaps, even a sense of personal failure when the employee's performance did not improve.

[He] really tried to make some changes. . . . [He] really tried, and I gave him a extra year, and we provided him with released time off, tutorial help, and even an incentive to pay him money if he would learn. He was never able to do it, and so I had to release him.

N described a situation of having tried to influence a subordinate's performance for months. Finally, the person took a job elsewhere. When N was asked how he felt having to deal with the employee over
and over again, he replied:

Tired. I was really starting to, to really have doubts about myself. I've had, I've had many staff. . . . I've always had good success with people. . . . And I've always been able to provide them [my staff] with good experiences, knowledge, a more receptive style . . . and I would not have any effect on this person. I was being point blank as I could, and just not having any success. I was really starting to wonder if maybe it was me. . . . I had just lost all of my energy. And I told my boss, "I can't do it. I said I can't do it. I'm just beating my head against the wall, and what it's doing it's also destroying my credibility.

The examples described by supervisors concerning feedback and performance predominantly involved the use of corrective feedback. References concerning positive feedback tended to be shared less frequently and were generalized statements, rather than incident specific. For example, A commented:

Whenever a [staff member] does something outstanding, I will write something informally praising them for that, reinforcing it with a letter in their permanent file in the Personnel Office. . . . I notice I get much more productivity from staff when I can remember to praise them for jobs well done.

Similarly, G commented on letting his staff know when things were going well, and he indicated he always shares with his staff complimentary notes and letters he receives, as well as those involving complaints. Q commented he had been trying to increase the self-confidence of one of his subordinates by being complimentary about his work wherever he could. Q was concerned, however, that his compliments may have led the employee to conclude he was performing better than he actually was.
Summary of the Findings

This chapter presented a synthesis of the data collected at the research locale concerning performance feedback. The study and the findings which resulted concerned two broad research questions:

1. What is the general nature of the feedback that occurs in a higher education setting?

2. What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff?

The data were gathered through semistructured interviews with 27 administrative staff.

In the research plan, seven subordinate questions were identified for study under the first broad question and three under the second question. In order to reduce redundancy in presenting the findings, the researcher collapsed the seven subordinate questions under the first broad research question into three questions. The subordinate questions under the second broad research question, however, were not altered.

The following statements serve as a summary of the findings concerning the research questions which guided this study:

The Nature of the Feedback That Occurred

Research Question 1: Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?

1. Staff received performance feedback formally through the annual evaluation process and student evaluation of instruction, and
informally through a variety of means.

2. Key to supervisors conducting formal evaluations was the commitment demonstrated by the cabinet-level administrator in the reporting line.

3. Staff expressed ambivalence regarding the formal evaluation process; that is, some do the evaluations, but don't see them as important, while others don't do them, but expressed a belief in their importance.

4. Three reasons were given by supervisors for not conducting formal evaluations: lack of support by the upper administration, evaluation is not tied to salary, and evaluation should be ongoing.

5. In spite of the expectation set by the institution's board of regents that formal evaluations be conducted, there was a large number of staff who were either not evaluated or who received only the most perfunctory evaluation.

6. The informal means by which staff received feedback were both fortuitous and planned. Incidental feedback occurred through the daily work flow process and letters, notes, and verbal comments initiated by others. Planned feedback occurred through procedural checks built into the work flow, "post mortem" sessions held to solicit staff input, and clients' written evaluations of programs.

7. Subjects reported receiving performance feedback primarily from six sources: the formal organization, co-workers, supervisors, the task itself, one's own feelings and ideas, and clients. The sources most frequently mentioned by staff were co-workers and supervisors.
8. Supervisors were disappointed in the amount of positive feedback they gave, and subordinates were disappointed in the amount they received.

9. Supervisors perceived that their subordinate staff received enough performance feedback.

10. Subordinates perceived that the amount of performance feedback they received was insufficient.

11. Supervisors (as subordinates) perceived the amount of feedback they received as inadequate.

Research Question 2: Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

1. Supervisors provided performance feedback to accomplish three role expectations: staff evaluation, staff development, and controlling the work flow process.

2. Academic department heads were more likely to provide performance feedback for evaluation and development purposes, while administrative department heads were influenced by their control and evaluation roles.

3. The principal catalyst to supervisors providing feedback was a desire to correct a deficiency in the work flow process.

4. Deficiencies in the work flow process were brought to the supervisors' attention through their own observations of staff behavior, a review of work products, and complaints from others.

5. The primary reason supervisors do not provide performance feedback is to avoid perceived emotional issues associated with the
giving of feedback.

6. Three barriers to feedback also viewed as influential were: insufficient performance-related information to make a judgment, a feeling that providing feedback makes no difference, and lack of time.

Research Question 3: Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

1. For the most part, staff do not seek feedback on their performance.

2. The barriers to staff seeking feedback are ignorance, self-doubt, pride, disdain, apathy, and lack of trust.

3. Ignorance: Staff failed to perceive information as feedback, they were uninformed about what other staff do in their jobs, and they were unsophisticated about what they had a right to expect of their supervisors.

4. Self-doubt: Several staff lacked self-confidence in their abilities and did not accept their accomplishments. Statements of self-doubt were shared more frequently by female subjects.

5. Pride: Two subjects shared a belief that they were in the best position to assess their performance.

6. Disdain: Many staff expressed lack of respect for how both formal and informal feedback were handled.

7. Apathy: Individuals failed to act in order to correct performance feedback judged inadequate.

8. Lack of trust: Supervisors were not viewed by some staff as credible sources of feedback.
9. No one barrier to staff seeking feedback was predominant. Considering the number of barriers identified, and the relationships among them, it was apparent the culture at the institution does not support feedback-seeking behavior.

The Relationship Between Feedback and Performance

Research Question 4: Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving performance feedback?

1. Generally, staff did not change their work behavior as the result of receiving performance feedback.

2. A few staff reported having changed the way they performed a specific work procedure based on task feedback.

Research Question 5: What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?

1. Three kinds of performance feedback were mentioned by three or four staff as being most useful: student feedback, quantitative data, and self.

2. Conspicuous by their absence as being useful sources of feedback were: one's supervisor and the formal evaluation.

Research Question 6: Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?

1. Supervisors perceived that performance feedback contributes to improved performance.

2. Supervisors realized, however, that feedback did not always result in improved performance and seemed to be very pragmatic concerning their expectations in this regard.
3. The examples of feedback and performance shared by supervisors tended to involve corrective feedback.

4. Examples given of positive feedback described general versus specific feedback and feedback that served the purpose of making a person "feel good" rather than identifying a work behavior.

Discussed in the next chapter are generalized conclusions, implications for higher education administrators, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to Chapter V

This chapter expands upon the research findings presented in Chapter IV. The researcher-as-instrument aspect of qualitative research is more involved in this chapter, as the researcher's work experience and intuition interact with the data on a more conceptual level. The interplay between subjects and their roles and recurring themes (within one subject's testimony and across subjects) are explored. Chapter V is organized in six sections: More About the Research Setting, A Review of Methods and Findings, Emerging Themes, Summary and Conclusions, Recommendations for Practitioners, and Implications for Future Research.

More About the Research Setting

Characteristics of the Staff

Data collection included information about the characteristics of those interviewed. Of the staff interviewed, 17 were males and 10 females. Supervisors averaged 8.6 subordinate administrative staff; however, the average is skewed by the large number of faculty supervised by academic department heads and one administrative department head. The modal number of supervisees was 4 and the median

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5. Two-thirds of the staff had been employed for 10 or more years. No one had worked in an administrative capacity at any other institution of higher education. Two-thirds of the staff had 10 or more years of administrative experience. The average age of the subjects was 46.6 years. The highest degrees earned included: 3 doctoral degrees, 8 master's, 11 baccalaureate, 2 associates, and 3 high school diplomas. In summary, the subject group is a well-seasoned work force; outside of the academic department head category, there is an imbalance between males and females; 60% of the staff do not have advanced degrees; and no one has had administrative experience at another university. (See Appendix C, Staff Characteristics.)

Data Triangulation

A Special Informant

Only one of the upper-level administrators, BB, was available and willing to be interviewed as part of this research project. BB preferred that his interview not be taped, and the information he shared is not included in the coded data. The researcher decided to treat BB as a special informant, rather than in the same capacity as the other subjects. Because of his knowledge and experience and his familiarity with the institution, BB was a valuable informant. A review of the content of the interview with him provided the researcher with another means of confirming some of her interpretations of the data analysis (data triangulation).
BB relayed both objective and perceptual data. From an objective standpoint, he confirmed certain characteristics about the institution:

1. There are two evaluation processes, one for faculty and one for administrative staff. (As defined in Chapter III, administrative staff are those who are not faculty, clerical, custodial, or other support staff.)
2. Faculty are unionized; administrative staff are not.
3. The administrative positions are classified; that is, positions are assigned to a "classification level" based on responsibilities assigned.
4. Nontenured faculty are evaluated every year; tenured faculty every 3 years. The forms used for faculty evaluation are agreed upon by the department and the faculty. If faculty do not express their preferences regarding the form, the department head has the "right" to make up the form. The process for faculty evaluation is contract-driven.
5. Academic department heads are evaluated every year; however, feedback for evaluation purposes is solicited from their faculty every other year.
6. The board of regents mandated formal evaluation several years earlier. (And, according to BB, they're "under the impression that the system is happening.")

BB also shared some of his own perceptions about the institution. He referred to the institution as "an institution that is unsure of its leadership." Regarding the formal evaluation:
"Between you and me, only half the offices are doing it, only me and _______ [a department head in another division]." At a recent meeting, the attitude about doing the evaluations was "heck with it; let's give across the board increases." Several persons attending the meeting expressed not liking the punitive aspect of differential salary increases. BB commented, "They seem to be forgetting about the rewards aspect on the other hand." BB's assessment is that people are too lazy to do it [fill out the formal evaluation forms]. ... I believe in the evaluation system. ... What I do with regard to evaluation is largely because of me rather than "having" to do it. ... What I've learned at other institutions, I've applied. BB felt the climate at the institution was changing; for example, recent evaluations in his division were very positive and, although "we're still not sophisticated [in regard to performance evaluation], we've made a lot of progress." He concluded his comments about the formal evaluation process by saying: "Doing evaluations takes a lot of time--probably 2 weeks out of my work year. It's important. It's a symbolic statement." When asked how he was rewarded for exhibiting this level of commitment, BB replied: "I'm pleased with myself. The people out there appreciate it. My people appreciate it."

BB obviously strives to be a role-model for his department heads. A majority of the interview was spent discussing issues concerning staff development, goal setting, productivity measures, sharing information he receives with his staff, and reports he uses to communicate departments' and staff's accomplishments to the president, the board, and others within the institution. Although
BB emphasized using positive reinforcement with his subordinates, he also discussed confronting poor performance and providing his department heads with negative as well as positive feedback.

Lack of Confidence in Leadership

During one of the researcher's visits to campus, an article which had been in the local newspaper was being discussed. The article concerned the generally low grades [on effectiveness] which the faculty association had given to the higher-level administrators and the board of regents. Those evaluated were assigned grade-point averages to the cumulative results of eight questions.

The lack of confidence in the institution's leadership expressed by the faculty has a relationship to many of the statements of dissatisfaction and uncertainty relayed by those interviewed. Statements which illustrated dissatisfaction, by way of review, included: (a) the lack of accountability for implementation of the formal evaluation program, (b) supervisors being unavailable and insufficiently prepared for their roles (or not knowing enough about the functions performed by their subordinates), (c) insufficient positive feedback provided in the work environment, and (d) the focus on mistakes (complaints). Statements of uncertainty or ambiguity, for example, concerned: (a) not being sure if one's supervisors required formal evaluations to be conducted, (b) wondering if one's work activities were the ones the institution expected, and (c) not being informed about university-wide goals (the big
picture). Responsibility for the situations described above typically rests with upper-level management.

A Review of Methods and Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the performance feedback provided to administrative staff in a higher education organizational setting and the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. The study was conducted using a naturalistic design, more specifically, semistructured interviewing. The interviews were focused to elicit information concerning two general questions: (1) What is the nature of the feedback that occurs for administrative staff in a higher education setting? (2) What is the relationship between this feedback and the performance of staff? Ten subordinate research questions were developed based on the review of the literature.

1. How much and what kinds of feedback do staff receive? Is it enough?
2. From what sources and under what circumstances do staff receive feedback?
3. Under what circumstances do supervisors give feedback?
4. Do supervisors provide feedback with planned intent or is the giving of feedback incidental?
5. Do staff seek feedback and how?
6. What are the barriers to staff seeking feedback?
7. What are the barriers to supervisors providing feedback?
8. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback?

9. What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?

10. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?

The review of the literature on performance feedback produced three compelling reasons for the selection of a naturalistic research design and a higher education setting:

1. Most of the existing research was either based on survey data or used an experimental or quasi-experimental design, limiting the richness of data collection and resulting in a complex construct (performance feedback) being treated simplistically.

2. Another limitation of the existing research on performance feedback was the absence of studies conducted among higher education administrators in their work setting, the specific area of interest to the researcher.

3. Researchers and management practitioners alike decried the chasm between theory and practice.

A naturalistic design, free of manipulation and artificial restrictions and holistic in its approach, was chosen because of its potential for contributing new understandings about the concept of feedback in the work setting. These understandings would bring theory and practice regarding feedback and performance in a higher education setting into closer alignment.

The semistructured technique facilitated the gathering of a large amount of data in the setting. Additionally, the interactive
nature of the process allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up ques-
tions and request clarification of responses as needed.

The site for this naturalistic study was a small midwestern
coeducational public university of about 3,500 students, located in
a rural setting. Subjects were 27 members of the administrative
staff, 13 interviewed as subordinates and 14 as supervisors.

The research questions provided direction to the development of
interview guides, one for use with supervisors and one for subordi-
nates. The interview guides aided the researcher in directing the
interviews, but still allowed the interview to be shaped by the
respondents. Interviews, typically 1.5 hours in length, were con-
ducted over a 2-month period. Interviews were recorded using an
audio-tape recorder. Verbatim transcriptions of the tapes were
typed. Transcription of the interviews began following the first
set of interviews and continued for several months following comple-
tion of the last interview.

**Ethnograph** (Seidel et al., 1988), a software program for ana-
lyzing qualitative data, facilitated the coding of voluminous pages
of data. Data reduction was accomplished through the assignment of
code words (which had been given operational definitions) to seg-
ments of text and the grouping of the coded segments under 1 of the
10 research questions. Narrative descriptions and matrices were
developed to summarize the data by research question.

The research findings, presented in Chapter IV and the refer-
enced appendices, were organized under 6, rather than the original
research questions. This change was made to reduce redundancy in presenting the data. The findings are summarized below:

The Nature of the Feedback That Occurred

**Research Question 1:** Under what conditions and from whom do staff receive feedback? Is it enough?

1. Staff received performance feedback formally through the annual evaluation process and student evaluation of instruction, and informally through a variety of means.

2. Key to supervisors conducting formal evaluations was the commitment demonstrated by the cabinet-level (reports to the president) administrator in the reporting line.

3. Staff expressed ambivalence regarding the formal evaluation process; that is, some do the evaluations, but don't see them as important, while others don't do them, but expressed a belief in their importance.

4. Three reasons were given by supervisors for not conducting formal evaluations: lack of support by upper administration, evaluation not being tied to salary, and their preference for ongoing evaluation.

5. In spite of the expectation set by the institution's board of regents that formal evaluations be conducted, there were a large number of staff who were either not evaluated or who received only the most perfunctory evaluation.

6. The informal means by which staff received feedback were both fortuitous and planned. Incidental feedback occurred through
the daily work flow process and letters, notes, and verbal comments initiated by others. Planned feedback occurred through procedural checks built into the work flow, "post mortem" sessions held to solicit staff input, and clients' written evaluations of programs.

7. Subjects reported receiving performance feedback primarily from six sources: the formal organization, co-workers, supervisors, the task itself, one's own feelings and ideas, and clients. The sources most frequently mentioned by staff were co-workers and supervisors.

8. Supervisors were disappointed in the amount of positive feedback they gave, and subordinates were disappointed in the amount they received.

9. Supervisors perceived their subordinate staff received enough performance feedback.

10. Subordinates perceived the amount of performance feedback they received was insufficient.

11. Supervisors (as subordinates) perceived the amount of feedback they received as inadequate.

Research Question 2: Under what conditions do supervisors provide feedback? Are there barriers to supervisors providing feedback?

1. Supervisors provided performance feedback to accomplish three role expectations: staff evaluation, staff development, and controlling the work flow process.

2. Academic department heads were more likely to provide performance feedback for evaluation and development purposes, while
administrative department heads were influenced by their control and evaluation roles.

3. The principal catalyst to supervisors providing feedback was a desire to correct a deficiency in the work flow process.

4. Deficiencies in the work flow process were brought to the supervisors' attention through their own observations of staff behavior, a review of work products, and complaints from others.

5. The primary reason supervisors did not provide performance feedback was to avoid perceived emotional issues associated with the giving of feedback.

6. Three barriers to feedback also viewed as influential were: insufficient performance related information to make a judgment, a feeling that providing feedback makes no difference, and lack of time.

   Research Question 3: Do staff seek feedback? Are there barriers to staff seeking feedback?

1. For the most part, staff do not seek feedback on their performance.

2. The barriers to staff seeking feedback are ignorance, self-doubt, pride, disdain, apathy, and lack of trust.

3. Ignorance: Staff failed to perceive information as feedback; they were uninformed about what other staff do in their jobs; and they were unsophisticated about what they had a right to expect of their supervisors.

4. Self-doubt: Several staff lacked self-confidence in their abilities and did not accept their accomplishments. Statements of
self-doubt were shared more frequently by female subjects.

5. Pride: Two subjects shared a belief that they were in the best position to assess their performance.

6. Disdain: Many staff expressed lack of respect for how both formal and informal feedback were handled.

7. Apathy: Individuals failed to act in order to correct performance feedback judged inadequate.

8. Lack of trust: Supervisors were not viewed by some staff as credible sources of feedback.

9. No one barrier to supervisors providing feedback was predominant. Considering the number of barriers identified, and the relationship among them, the researcher concluded that the culture at the institution does not support feedback seeking behavior.

The Relationship Between Feedback and Performance

**Research Question 4:** Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving performance feedback?

1. Generally, staff did not change their work behavior as the result of receiving performance feedback.

2. A few staff reported having changed the way they performed a specific work procedure based on task feedback.

**Research Question 5:** What kind(s) of feedback is(are) most useful to staff?

1. Three kinds of performance feedback were mentioned by three or four staff as being most useful: student feedback, quantitative data, and self.
2. Conspicuous by their absence as being useful sources of feedback were: one's supervisor and the formal evaluation.

Research Question 6: Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance?

1. Supervisors perceived performance feedback contributes to improved performance.

2. Supervisors realized, however, that feedback did not always result in improved performance and seemed to be very pragmatic concerning their expectations in this regard.

3. The examples of feedback and performance shared by supervisors tended to involve corrective feedback.

4. Examples given of positive feedback described general versus specific feedback and feedback which served the purpose of making a person "feel good" rather than identifying a work behavior.

Emerging Themes

Several themes emerge from the interview data, some of which are tangential to the study of performance feedback; for example, the exemplary work ethic and spirit of cooperation exhibited by those interviewed. Those emergent themes judged to be influential concerning performance feedback are presented in the sections which follow.

A Culture Nonsupportive of Performance Feedback

Staff at the institution are expected to conduct formal evaluations annually. BB's assessment that only about half the offices
are doing it, however, seems to reflect what is actually happening with regard to the mandate. In BB's reporting line, the department heads were knowledgeable about evaluation, staff development, and feedback; and all who were interviewed did the evaluations, as BB does of them. BB's division stood alone in its solid commitment to performance evaluation. Although there was some support in a second division, support did not exist throughout the division. That many were frustrated, and even angry, at the situation is clear from the data. U assessed that "most performance evaluation is pretty much nonexistent." Several staff shared they had worked at the institution for more than 20 years and had never had an evaluation.

The same reporting lines which required formal evaluations also shared more systematic approaches to providing ongoing feedback; for example, setting goals, monitoring achievement of them, holding staff meetings, soliciting student and other client feedback, etc. Several supervisors appeared to be struggling because of their lack of training and supervisory support for performance evaluation and feedback. One supervisor, for example, brought the formal evaluation forms he was preparing for his subordinates to the interview with the researcher. He seemed "hungry" for someone with whom to discuss the approach he was using. Based on his description of his functions and the efforts he was making to evaluate his staff, the researcher viewed him as a capable and hard-working manager, but someone who could benefit from some performance feedback and coaching himself. And, certainly memorable, are the perceptions expressed by B: Asking for feedback is something resented by others;
and if your boss has to tell you you're doing a good job, chances are, you aren't.

Lack of Sophistication

BB expressed his perception that the staff at the institution lack sophistication about staff evaluation. In discussing the barriers to staff seeking feedback, the researcher used a different term, ignorance, to convey a similar perception. Staff at the institution have virtually no administrative experience in higher education, other than what they have "learned by doing" at this institution. Academic department heads were much more sophisticated than other administrative staff concerning their roles as managers; this was especially true for the evaluation and staff development functions. The expectations of their supervisor, and the modeling he provided, are the obvious reasons for their "sophistication." Another could be their level of educational achievement.

The most sophisticated regarding both formal and informal feedback among the administrative supervisors were those who have had management experience outside of a university environment. Similarly, the few subordinate staff who were knowledgeable about the concept had had administrative experience other than at this institution. Several of the administrative staff were "promoted" to their rank from clerical positions, the result of a formal position review which was conducted several years ago for the institution by an outside consultant. In some respects, some of these staff continued to view themselves as clerical staff and were treated as such by
their supervisor. Some displayed this attitude by the low expectations they had for their supervisors; for example, didn't seem to expect more direction, informal feedback, evaluation, management training, or professional development opportunities. Others expressed insecurity in having to interact with others, both inside and outside the university, whom they viewed as being more educated, successful, or high-ranking.

**Physical Proximity**

Only three subjects mentioned that not being located in close proximity to their staff made their supervisory role more difficult. Generally, supervisors expressed being very satisfied with their physical proximity to their subordinates. Both supervisors and subordinates said the proximity of their office locations facilitated daily informal interaction with each other.

Proximity, and the resultant frequency of contact, may be a mitigating factor in the way performance feedback was viewed by many of the staff interviewed. For example, supervisors assessed that the performance feedback their staff received was sufficient. Subordinate staff often commented they knew they were doing a good job because my supervisor would tell me if I weren't, implying the supervisor was in a position to know the quality of the work being done. Additionally, subordinate staff seemed satisfied with the amount of task (work flow) feedback they received. The dissatisfaction subordinates expressed concerned either wanting more information about the "total picture" (university priorities and directions
and how they "fit in") and how their overall performance was perceived. Another source of dissatisfaction was the infrequent positive feedback they received, especially from their supervisors—a situation, unfortunately, which did not appear to be influenced by the proximity factor.

**Ambivalence and Ambiguity**

A thread throughout the interviews was the ambivalence of staff toward feedback, more directly expressed about the formal evaluation, but also implied through the minimal amount of feedback seeking behavior engaged in by staff. Although several staff bemoaned the absence of formal evaluation, and one acknowledged he would not be hesitant to approach his supervisor about wanting to be evaluated, no one had taken any action to change the situation. Another subordinate, \( P \), stated he would like more input from his supervisor, both positive and negative. When \( P \) was asked if he would like to be formally evaluated, however, he said: "I really don't know about that. . . . I mean I would look at these things [formal evaluation] with some bit of trepidation, even though in my mind I believe there wouldn't be anything to worry about."

Formal evaluation is required for faculty by contract at the research institution. There is a clearly stated role expectation, therefore, for academic department heads concerning the evaluation function. In the administrative arena, however, supervisors, especially in one reporting line, faced a more ambiguous situation—-they were not quite sure if they were required by their supervisor to do
formal evaluations. Several in the line stated they did formal evaluations because it was required; however, several others (who didn't do them) stated they would do formal evaluations when their supervisor required it. The supervisor under discussion has not done formal evaluations on his subordinates except for the first year formal evaluations were mandated by the board of regents.

Time

Another theme which emerged from an analysis of the data was that of time or, more precisely, lack of time. Supervisors stated one of the barriers to providing feedback was the fact that evaluations were very time intensive. They also commented on wanting (needing) to take more time to: (a) give performance feedback to their staff, (b) observe faculty teach and to write up the summaries of both their observations and student evaluation forms, (c) engage in goal-setting with their staffs, (d) write notes of appreciation and praise, and (e) observe staff as they work.

A number of subordinates (especially supervisors speaking from the perspective of subordinates) decried the unavailability of their supervisors. Time, however, was another domain wherein some staff were ambivalent. While subjects generally expressed wanting to have more supervisory time and attention, a few also expressed pride in being given free rein to do their jobs as they preferred. 0, for example, felt strongly that his supervisor was away from campus too much and was not available to him; however, he also expressed great frustration at the way his supervisor became involved in the detail
of Q's functions.

J was unique among the group interviewed in that he received little direction or feedback (that wasn't a reaction to a student-related problem), but J did not express any wish for more of either. He contrasted the amount of time he spends with his supervisor at this stage of his employment versus when he was in his first year of hire, seeing the lack of attention as a reflection on his competence.

... when I first started, it was a lot more frequent. It was like, there for a while I thought it was every week. I was always on the firing line, but I think what he wanted is, he wanted instant feedback about what's going on, on a weekly basis. Hey, what's going on in the Center, and what's it doing. As we've grown, now, and as we've proven that, hey, this is what's going to happen, it's kind of allowed us a little more leeway.

In contrast to J's satisfaction with the availability of his supervisor was the assessment of another staff member in the same reporting line. S, who has been employed by the institution for a relatively brief time, has a total of 25 years' administrative experience. His prior experience was outside of the field of education, but in the public sector.

I don't think he calls me into his office three times a year, if that. As far as how we're doing or anything like that, never. He pretty much just leaves me alone to run my department and, yet on the other hand, I never really know how he's thinking.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the performance feedback that occurred in a higher education setting and
the relationship of that feedback to staff performance. The findings presented in Chapter IV and the additional insights and relationships developed in Chapter V provide the basis for the conclusions presented in the sections which follow. First, the conclusions are presented in narrative form in three sections: (1) the nature of the feedback that occurred, (2) the relationship between the feedback which occurred and work performance, and (3) the themes which emerged from the data. Second, more specific conclusions drawn from the data and the researcher's interpretations based on both insights and work experience are presented.

The Nature of the Feedback That Occurred

Staff at the research institution received performance feedback which was both planned and fortuitous. In spite of formal evaluation being mandated by the board of regents, there was great disparity of treatment for staff concerning formal evaluation. For the faculty, a group which was not included in those interviewed, formal evaluation is required by contract. Based on the interviews of four academic department heads and the special informant, this aspect of the contract is taken seriously by the academic division, and there is a systematic approach to formal evaluation; that is, student evaluation of instruction each term, classroom observations of teaching, and annual evaluation forms completed. One academic department head also reported being formally evaluated; this was substantiated by the special informant. For administrative staff at this institution, supervisors and subordinates alike, formal
evaluation was inconsistently conducted at best, and sometimes non-existent.

Informal feedback, defined as both planned and incidental feedback delivered on a day-to-day basis, occurred in varying amounts for different people. The quantity and quality of such feedback available in a subordinate's work environment were dependent on three factors: (1) the nature of the job (many highly task-oriented jobs had feedback available through the work flow process), (2) the style and commitment of the supervisor (frequency of contact and belief in the value of feedback), and (3) the initiative exhibited by the employee (some staff solicited feedback from clients and others collected and paid attention to objective data).

Staff received feedback from six sources: (1) the formal organization, (2) co-workers, (3) supervisors, (4) the task itself, (5) one's own feelings and ideas, and (6) clients. Co-workers (16), followed closely by supervisors (15), were mentioned most frequently by subjects. One's own feelings and ideas was the least frequently mentioned source. Although staff reported receiving both positive feedback (compliments) and negative feedback (complaints and supervisory contacts to correct behavior), the desire to correct a deficiency seemed to the catalyst to providing feedback the majority of the time.

Supervisors, for the most part, said their subordinate staff received enough performance feedback, whereas subordinates reported the amount of feedback they received was insufficient. The data supported that supervisors did not provide more performance feedback...
because they wanted to avoid the perceived emotional issues associated with doing so. Subordinates did not engage in more feedback-seeking behavior because of a variety of issues; that is, ignorance, self-doubt, pride, disdain, apathy, and lack of trust. No one issue surfaced as being the predominant factor, rather the researcher concluded the organizational culture at the institution did not support such behavior.

The Relationship Between Feedback and Performance

Subordinate staff generally did not change their work behavior as a result of the performance feedback they received. Several factors, suggested by the researcher but supported by the data, may have contributed to this outcome. Only two of the subordinates were formally evaluated except for the first year formal evaluation was mandated by the board of regents. Although reports of positive feedback were not pervasive, as one would expect, those mentioned were reinforcing rather than prescriptive. A typical response, when staff were asked how they knew how they were doing their jobs, was "the absence of complaints." (The absence of information doesn't provide any guidance for changing one's behavior.) Finally, several responses by those interviewed led the researcher to conclude staff at times did not recognize feedback which was available to them.

There is a negative relationship between the sources of feedback mentioned most frequently and those reported as being most useful. Those mentioned most frequently were co-workers and supervisors. Self (one's own thoughts and ideas) was mentioned least
frequently. Reported as most useful were student feedback (client), quantitative data, and self. Supervisors were not mentioned by anyone as being most useful, and co-workers were mentioned by only one person.

Supervisors expressed their belief that performance feedback contributes to improved work performance. They were also pragmatic regarding their expectations concerning the influence of feedback on performance. Recognizing that there could be intervening factors at play, such as the employee's attitude and ability and the availability of supervisor-controlled consequences, supervisors did not expect feedback to always result in positive outcomes. Some recognized a necessary first step to changing an employee's behavior is bringing the deficiency to the person's attention.

Emerging Themes

As the researcher reflected on the findings produced from the analysis of the interview data, several themes appeared repeatedly. These themes were validated by further review of the data and, in some cases, by the information provided by the special informant.

A Culture Nonsupportive of Performance Feedback

Supervisors were not required to carry out the mandate of the board of regents to do formal evaluations of their staff. Two of the three cabinet-level administrators did not conduct formal evaluations. The Employee Relations Office staff did not follow-up with those who did not submit completed evaluations. Those who were not
evaluated did not act to influence change. Subordinates did not seek feedback, except in rare instances, and they were generally surprised with the researcher asked: "Have you ever asked anyone for feedback."

**Lack of Sophistication**

The administrative staff were typically long-term employees whose work experience has been limited to the research institution, and a number had been promoted from among the clerical ranks. Few management training and development experiences had been provided. As a result, many staff did not appear to be aware of ways in which to provide systematic performance feedback.

**Physical Proximity**

The location of many supervisors in the same general work area as their staff was a positive situation at the institution. Generally, subordinate staff described close working relationships with their supervisors, and they received day-to-day feedback on the work-flow process. Physical proximity and task feedback, unfortunately, did not completely counterbalance the lack of information received concerning their overall performance or their desire to have a better understanding of the "total picture."

**Ambivalence and Ambiguity**

Subjects' ambivalence toward feedback was expressed through their contradictory statements about wanting a formal evaluation and
yet not inquiring when none was forthcoming. A number of supervisors were uncertain whether or not their supervisors required formal evaluations.

**Time**

Supervisors mentioned they did not conduct formal evaluations because of time constraints. Several mentioned the need to find time to observe their employees' performance and to positively reinforce staff for their accomplishments. Subordinates expressed disappointment concerning the lack of availability of their supervisors for consultation and their tardiness in making decisions.

**Specific Conclusions**

The findings concerning the interview data collected at the research location and the conclusions derived from them may be relevant to administrators in other, similar university environments. The context in which performance feedback occurs, however, shapes the nature of it and must be considered when determining the generalizability of the conclusions to other higher education settings.

1. Although higher education is a unique work environment, university staff share many of the challenges concerning performance feedback experienced by their counterparts in a private sector profit setting. The problems managers face in regard to performance feedback, however, may be exacerbated in the higher education environment where administrators are frequently inadequately trained for their management roles. (The literature on performance feedback
contained numerous articles about the efforts made by businesses to provide training and development experiences for their employees.)

2. Higher education leaders in similar situations must do more than mandate performance feedback. Without persistent follow-up for purposes of accountability by each level of management and recognition for providing formal and informal feedback as part of one's job performance, effective performance feedback will not consistently occur.

3. Performance feedback will rarely occur in such work settings unless supervisors model effective feedback-giving behaviors themselves.

4. Supervisors in this type of higher education environment are uncomfortable giving feedback, both positive and negative; they prefer to avoid the perceived emotional issues associated with it.

5. Under similar circumstances, higher education administrative staff will not seek feedback; not knowing how their performance is perceived may be preferable to the risk of hearing something negative.

6. In addition to fearing the perceived emotional issues associated with performance feedback, supervisors in such higher education settings do not provide more feedback to staff because of time constraints and not having enough information on which to base a judgment about performance.

7. Self-generated feedback and feedback built into the works flow process are less threatening and more useful than formal appraisal feedback (evaluating how they did the job) to staff in
similar work situations.

8. There is a negative relationship between the administrative hierarchy and the amount of feedback that occurs in higher education settings like the institution studied. (The higher the level of the position, the less feedback occurs.)

9. Administrative staff in this type of higher education environment are most satisfied and supportive of a performance feedback system which includes setting goals and monitoring progress towards their achievement.

10. Co-workers and supervisors are the two most frequently mentioned sources of feedback for administrative staff in this higher education setting.

11. Under similar circumstances, client feedback (primarily from students), quantitative data, and staffs' own ideas and thoughts will be the most useful sources of performance feedback. (The formal evaluation and one's supervisor will be less useful.)

12. Based on the literature concerning performance feedback, higher education administrative staff places more credibility on client feedback than do their counterparts in business settings.

13. Staff in this higher education setting are not sufficiently aware of the performance information available in their work environments.

14. Positive feedback occurs with less frequency in a higher education setting like that of the research locale than does feedback provided to correct a deficiency.
15. Supervisors in such a higher education setting find staff evaluation and performance feedback important but unpleasant to provide.

16. All too much of the information that staff in this type of environment have regarding their performance is the "absence of information." In the absence of complaints or negative comments from a supervisor, one concludes that all is well.

17. Under similar circumstances, good performers in higher education administration want to be told they're doing a good job.

18. Supervisors in like higher education settings are inaccurate in concluding that their subordinates receive enough performance related information.

19. Physical proximity of supervisor and subordinate contributes to ongoing task and work-flow feedback in this higher education setting, but not necessarily to sharing summative evaluation feedback.

20. The most common barriers to feedback-seeking behavior by staff under these circumstances are: ignorance of feedback as a phenomenon, lack of confidence, a conviction that oneself is the most knowledgeable party concerning one's performance, lack of respect for the evaluation process, unwillingness to risk what they might learn, and their supervisor's lack of credibility.

21. Female administrators may have a greater tendency to experience self-doubt in this type of work setting (or may be more willing to share their feelings about it).
22. The relationship between feedback and performance in a higher education setting is complex, and contravening variables, such as ability, attitude, and perceived consequences and rewards may mitigate against a change in work behavior.

Several practical recommendations for higher education leaders in settings similar to the institution studied are presented in the section which follows.

Recommendations for Practitioners

One expectation was that this study would provide information which would help bridge the gap between theory and practice. The findings of the study confirmed previous research on performance feedback conducted in other settings. The data collected from the administrative staff at the institution demonstrate that, although higher education is a unique work environment, employees' experiences and expectations concerning performance feedback are very similar to those in other environments. Many of the recommendations described below for higher education management practitioners parallel those which have been recommended in the general management literature.

1. Institutions of higher education should provide performance feedback systems which include both ongoing feedback and formal annual evaluation. In order for the formal evaluation to be perceived as useful, the process should include more than a summary of the past year (telling people what they already know). The formal evaluation should include the development of personal and
job-specific objectives for the employee and a review of specific achievements related to previously set objectives. (The system described, coupled with the training referred to in Item 2 below, should address the concerns about formal evaluation expressed by the subjects interviewed at the institution studied.)

2. Personnel directors (or managers of human resources) should be required to provide educational programs for supervisory staff on the importance of providing performance feedback and training programs which teach supervisors the most effective methods for delivering feedback. Such programs should educate supervisors concerning the benefits to be gained from balancing positive and negative feedback, with emphasis on the value of positive reinforcement. (Supervisory staff at this institution, for the most part, were not knowledgeable [or convinced] of the importance of providing performance feedback, nor were they comfortable with delivering feedback, either positive or negative. By far, the feedback reported demonstrated that negative information received more attention than positive feedback.)

3. Educational and training programs should be required for subordinate staff. Programs for subordinate staff should focus on the kinds of feedback available in their work environments, their right to expect supervisory feedback, and practice in assertively requesting feedback as well as receiving, accepting, and using feedback. (Subordinate staff at this institution, in many instances, did not recognize feedback which was available to them, and they often were either uncomfortable or fearful of requesting or
receiving feedback.)

4. Higher education leaders need to do more than mandate performance feedback systems (both formal and informal); they should develop and implement accountability systems to ensure that feedback is occurring for staff at all levels. Accountability systems should be twofold: personnel staff must be required to follow up when formal evaluations are not received by that department, and supervisors must be evaluated on their performance feedback function. (Mandating a formal appraisal system at this institution, without accountability measures in place, obviously was ineffective.)

5. Providing performance feedback should be a clearly stated expectation on the job description for supervisors at all organizational levels, and rewards should be provided for those who perform the function well. (Based on the descriptions supervisors at this institution provided concerning how they viewed their supervisory roles, the evaluation function was narrowly understood; i.e., many did not mention the formal evaluation, and even fewer mentioned ongoing feedback, as a supervisory responsibility. Furthermore, more than 50% of the supervisors were not even evaluated on their performance.)

6. Presidents (and boards of regents) should review their administrative structures concerning supervisory span of control, balancing matters of economy with practicability. Having available time to supervise, including providing feedback, is essential. (At this institution, the span of control for one supervisor presented an impossible task. His subordinate staff were not evaluated, and
they reported his lack of availability. Furthermore, a number of supervisors mentioned lack of time as one of the barriers to providing feedback--time to prepare the forms and time to observe performance.

7. Higher education leaders should also consider the physical placement of supervisors relative to their subordinates. Locating supervisors within the same general work area as their staff contributes to more frequent opportunity to observe performance and provide ongoing feedback. (Physical proximity of supervisor to subordinates was an advantage at the research institution in terms of both knowledge of subordinates' functions and almost daily communication.)

8. Supervisory staff should be encouraged to identify, with their subordinates, quantitative data and other feedback which is built into the work flow process, including computer feedback where appropriate. (Staff at the institution were comfortable with work flow feedback and found it useful.)

9. Higher education administrators should devise ways of collecting and using client and co-worker performance feedback. Informal conversation, written questionnaires, suggestion boxes, and focus groups are possible vehicles for accomplishing such feedback. (Staff at this institution found client feedback to be the most useful source of information concerning their performance.)

10. Supervisors should regularly ask their subordinates if they're getting enough information about their job performance and show sincere interest in attending to the need for such information.
(In a number of instances, supervisors at the institution incorrectly assumed their staff received enough performance feedback.)

11. Higher education leaders should continue to examine the support provided to female employees. (In spite of the attention gender issues have received in the workplace, female employees at the research institution expressed more feelings of lack of support than did their male colleagues.)

Implications for Future Research

Research concerning performance feedback has been extensive and has contributed to furthering the knowledge of those who have an interest in using feedback to enhance work performance. In spite of what has been learned, however, that knowledge has not resulted in widespread practice in the workplace.

The current interest in total quality management and building effective work teams may result in renewed interest in practical applications of performance feedback research. For example, two recently published books, Driving Fear Out of the Workplace (Ryan & Oestreich, 1991) and Productive Workplaces (Weisbord, 1987) reference feedback as an important consideration to developing effective environments in the modern workplace. In the first, the authors suggest coaching subordinate leaders to recognize situations in the workplace which may be threatening to others and to provide feedback so that supervisors can correct the undesirable behaviors. One important step in modeling this type of feedback giving behavior, recommended by the authors, is for supervisors to ask peers and
subordinates directly to give them feedback on their own performance and conduct. The author of Productive Workplaces also discussed performance feedback: first, from the standpoint of feedback being an essential factor in making work satisfying to employees; and second, as a factor in developing transforming teamwork (cooperation).

How might future research concerning performance feedback serve this renewed interest? What is needed is convincing evidence that work environments which value (and practice) performance feedback are more productive and satisfying work environments than those which do not. Qualitative researchers could conduct evaluation studies of work environments which implement one or more of the recommendations for practitioners described in the previous section, provided such environments could be identified. Such research would demonstrate if it is possible to use the knowledge concerning performance feedback to design more effective work environments.

Another recommendation is that additional research, employing methods similar to those used in this study, be conducted in other locations to determine if these findings are generalizable. Settings for future research should include institutions of higher education similar and dissimilar to this institution, as well as other service-oriented organizations.

Three aspects of the research conducted could be particularly interesting and useful to explore in other higher education institutions and service-oriented organizations. First is the reliance on clients as a source of feedback recognized (and exploited) by staff
in these settings? Second, does the high regard for collegiality influence performance feedback? Third, does unionization influence performance feedback?
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Data Collection
Dear 3";

I am conducting a study on the influence of feedback on staff performance in an organizational setting. As a person who has spent twenty-five years in higher education administration, I am especially interested in the nature of the feedback that occurs in an educational setting. Although feedback as a concept has been researched fairly extensively, most of the research has followed an experimental design and has used college students as subjects and classrooms as the laboratories for the research. Since my research will be conducted in an actual work setting and will involve semi-structured interviews, I am hopeful that the research will provide new insights into the concept of performance feedback.

This letter is a request for your participation in the study. Participation will involve an hour to an hour and a half of your time for an initial interview with me. Subsequent interviews may be desirable in order to clarify interview content or pursue some additional information. I plan to conduct the interviews in June, July, and August at institution X. Interview questions will generally be open-ended and be about the nature of the performance feedback; e.g., from whom do you receive feedback (to whom do you give feedback), under what circumstances, how frequently, etc. The content of your interview will be kept in strict confidence. Although I will be audio-taping the interviews, all references to you by name will not be included in the transcript of the interview. In addition, any information that could identify you will also be excluded.

I sincerely hope, 4", that you will agree to participate. I believe that the information gained from my research will be of interest to managers and supervisors, especially those who work in a higher education setting.

Please read the enclosed consent form and, if you agree to participate, sign the form and return it to me when we meet to conduct the interview. The interviews will be conducted June 18, 19, and 20 (Tuesday - Thursday). Please contact Ms. Carol Bergman in my office (227-1702, Student Life, Northern Michigan University) by the end of the workday on Friday, June 14, to schedule a specific interview time. Interviews will be conducted in the X room at institution X.

Sincerely,

Karen M. Reese
Doctoral Student, Western Michigan University

Enclosure

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Before you formally agree to participate in this study, please read the information below. If you are then willing to participate, sign and date the form at the bottom of the page and return it to the researcher: Ms. Karen M. Reese, 409 East Ridge Street, Marquette, MI 49855. Additional information about this study may be obtained by contacting Ms. Reese at (906)225-5080.

I understand that the study in which I have been asked to participate is being conducted by Ms. Reese in partial fulfillment for her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University. Ms. Reese's dissertation topic is "Performance Feedback in an Organizational Setting." I understand that there is no direct benefit to me for participating in Ms. Reese's research. She has informed me, however, that her dissertation will be published and that her findings will be available to those who are interested in the topic of performance feedback.

The purpose of the research is to study the nature and influence of feedback on staff performance in an actual work setting. The subjects will be the administrative professional staff at [blank].

Ms. Reese will be interviewing from 20 to 30 staff members. Interviews will follow a semi-structured format and will last an hour to an hour and a half. Following the initial interview, Ms. Reese may find it necessary to conduct follow-up interviews in order to clarify previous interview content or to pursue additional information. Interview questions, generally, will have to do with the nature of the performance feedback that staff receive and their thoughts and feelings about it.

Ms. Reese has informed me that the interviews will be audio-taped and that verbatim transcripts of the interviews will be typed. The typed transcripts will refer to the person interviewed by a code name, and all references that would enable a person to be specifically identified will be removed from the transcripts. Only Ms. Reese, the person who types the transcripts, and the three faculty who serve on Ms. Reese's dissertation committee will have access to the audio-tapes. Ms. Reese will erase the tapes no later than two weeks from the time that she is notified by Western Michigan University that her dissertation has received final approval. When Ms. Reese quotes material from the interviews in her dissertation, all references that would allow a person to be identified will be removed. Ms. Reese has informed me that I may signal her to turn off the tape-recorder at any time during the interview. She has also informed me that I should feel free to indicate that I prefer not to answer any particular question. As a volunteer, I may decline to participate at any point in the study without penalty.

With these understandings, I voluntarily agree to participate.

Participant Date Researcher Date

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INTERVIEW GUIDE
(Supervisors)

This is an interview between Karen Reese (who is conducting research for her doctoral dissertation concerning feedback and staff performance) and ___________ (a staff member at institution X).

As I've mentioned, ___________, the research that I'm doing with the staff at X is for the dissertation that I'm working on for a degree from WMU. I've reviewed a lot of the research that's been done on the subject of performance feedback, and I've found that very little research has been done on this subject in a higher education setting. I believe that my findings from doing this research will contribute to furthering our understanding of performance feedback in an actual work setting.

__________, the information recorded in this interview will be treated confidentially. That means in transcribing the taped interviews, I'll be substituting a code name and not using your name. I'll also not be playing the tapes for anyone other than myself and the person who is typing the transcripts. The three faculty members who serve on my doctoral committee (faculty from WMU and NMU) will also have access to the tapes and the transcripts to check on the accuracy of my work.

I'll be interviewing between 20 and 30 people for my project. Some of the information gained from those interviewed will be presented in summary form; however, direct quotations will be used very extensively in the dissertation. When using direct quotations anything that would allow a person to be identified will be removed.

_________, at any time that you feel uncomfortable, signal me and I'll stop the recording equipment.

I appreciate that you've agreed to participate in this research project. I have (or I don't have) a signed consent form which explains the nature and purpose of the research. (If a consent form has not been completed, take the time to complete the form before proceeding.)

_________, do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
As I mentioned in the letter, I'm interested in learning more about how administrative staff who work in higher education obtain information about how they're performing their job responsibilities.

I'd like to begin by gaining an understanding of what your responsibilities are at X.

Would you tell me about your job here at X?

In looking at the administrative structure at X, it appears that you supervise a variety of people.

About how much of your time is spent in supervising your staff?

What does a supervisor do when he/she supervises?

Do you interact with your staff on a daily basis? (on a weekly basis?)

Can you think of instances that occurred this week when you worked closely with any of your staff?

Do you recall what prompted the exchange?

Would you describe for me how the exchange went? What did you say; what did he/she say?

How do you let your subordinate staff know how well they're performing their job?

Think of anyone on your staff. Can you think of an instance recently when you provided information to about his/her work performance? (in the last week?) (in the last month?) (in the last year?)

Would you please describe the instance as clearly as you can remember it? What did you say? What did he/she say?

Do you remember what prompted that situation (your providing the feedback) to happen? (Try to get a clear picture of what precipitated the exchange.)

How did you feel when you were telling that?
Interview Guide - Supervisors

How did __________ act when you gave him/her that information?

Did __________'s behavior change after you provided that information?

Can you think of another instance when you provided __________ with job-related information about how he/she was doing?

Think of another staff member. Would you try to recall a recent instance when you provided __________ with information about how he/she was doing.

(I'll summarize the kinds of feedback that I've heard the interviewee talk about so far. Depending upon what has been covered, I may ask:), other than providing your staff with information about how they're performing the tasks they've been hired to perform, can you think of other kinds of feedback that you've given your staff? (For example, work habits, communication style.) Could you please describe an instance when you provided this kind of information.

Do you think supervisors spend the same amount of time and effort helping each of their staff understand how they're doing? How does that fit your own experience?

Would you describe the formal evaluation process at X for me?

Do you remember the last time that you did formal evaluations with your staff?

Was that a good experience for you?

Can you recall something that you told each of your employees about their work performance during the formal evaluation review?

Are you aware if the employee changed his/her behavior in any way because of the information that you provided?

When you think about the job-related feedback that you provide for your staff, what or how would you like to change about it?

Has anyone ever asked you to give him/her information about how he/she did a particular activity/program or asked you to tell him/her in general how he/she was doing?
Who and under what circumstances did that happen?

Do you recall how you felt when you were asked by __________ to provide that information?

__________________, I've asked you a lot of questions about performance feedback. Maybe you have some opinions, ideas, suggestions, insights about the topic that my questions didn't give you a chance to provide. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the feedback?
INTERVIEW GUIDE
(Subordinate Staff)

This is an interview between Karen Reese (who is conducting research for her doctoral dissertation concerning feedback and staff performance) and __________ (a staff member at X).

As I've mentioned, __________, the research that I'm doing with the staff at X is for the dissertation that I'm working on for a degree from WMU. I've reviewed a lot of the research that's been done on the subject of performance feedback, and I've found that very little research has been done on this subject in a higher education setting. I believe that my findings from doing this research will contribute to furthering our understanding of performance feedback in an actual work setting.

__________, the information recorded in this interview will be treated confidentially. That means in transcribing the taped interviews, I'll be substituting a code name and not using your name. I'll also not be playing the tapes for anyone other than myself and the person who is typing the transcripts. The three faculty members who serve on my dissertation committee (faculty from WMU and NMU) will also have access to the tapes and the transcripts to check on the accuracy of my work.

I'll be interviewing between 20 and 30 people for my project. Some of the information gained from those interviewed will be presented in summary form; however, direct quotations will be used very extensively in the dissertation. When using direct quotations anything that would allow a person to be identified will be removed.

__________, at any time that you feel uncomfortable, signal me and I'll stop the recording equipment.

_________ I appreciate that you've agreed to participate in this research project. I have (or I don't have) a signed consent form which explains the nature and purpose of the research. (If a consent form has not been completed, take the time to complete the form before proceeding.)

_________, do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
Interview Guide - Subordinates

As I mentioned in the letter, I'm interested in learning more about how administrative staff who work in higher education receive feedback on their job performance. I'd like to begin by gaining an understanding of what your responsibilities are at X.

What's your job all about? What do you do in a typical day? (in a typical week?)

______ You've told me that your job responsibilities are ______. Could we focus on each of the different kinds of things that you do, in turn, now?

I'd like you to describe for me how you know how you're doing in regard to _________.

(Follow-up with each type of job function that is mentioned. In follow-up questions solicit information about who provides the feedback, how frequently does feedback occur, what provides the impetus to feedback being given.)

______, other than the information about how well you're doing your job, that you've already mentioned, is there anyone else who gives you any information about how you're doing your job?

(It may be necessary to provide examples: Do your co-workers ever give you any indication of what they think about your work? How about anyone outside of your office? outside of the University?)

Can you think of instances when you received information about how you're doing your job in the last week? (in the last month? in the last year?) Would you please describe the instance as clearly as you can remember it?

(Continue to ask for additional examples until no more information is being produced. Try to get at the purpose of the feedback, who gave the feedback, what specifically was said, what was its relevance to the job, etc.)

Would you describe how you felt when you were told ________?

How did you use the information that you were given? (Did the information lead you to change how or what you were doing?)

Was that piece of information valuable to you.
Interview Guide - Subordinates

(If in the responses to earlier questions the interviewee does not mention task feedback or any kind of self-feedback, then ask the following:

__________________, so far you've talked about how other people give you information about how you're doing your job. Are there ways that you can tell how you're doing, other than from people telling you?

Can you think of times when you've taken some action to find out how you did on a project or an interaction? or taken some action to find out, in general, how you're doing?

In general, ____________________, what do you expect from a supervisor?

(If providing performance feedback is mentioned, ask questions to clarify any specific expectations that the person has. If performance feedback is not mentioned, ask: Do you think that a supervisor should provide performance feedback to those whom she/he supervises?)

(If the interviewee mentions the formal evaluation process that X has, then ask:) Earlier you mentioned X's formal evaluation process. I would appreciate it if you would describe how the process works for me. Pretend that I'm a new staff member and that I've asked you to describe for me how I'll be evaluated here at X.

(If the interviewee does not mention the formal evaluation process, then ask: I understand that X has an annual formal evaluation process. I would appreciate if you would describe the process for me.

Do you remember your last formal evaluation? (Would you tell me about it?)

Was that a good experience for you?

Was it useful to you?

Did your formal evaluation result in any change in the way that you do your job?

When you think about all of the job-related feedback that you receive, what would you like to change about it?)

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Interview Guide - Subordinates

(From whom would you like to receive feedback? About what would you like to receive feedback?)

When you think about all of the job-related feedback that you receive, what do you find do be the most valuable to you?

Have you ever asked anyone to give you feedback about your job?

Who and under what circumstances did that happen?

How did you feel?

Would you like to seek feedback more often?

Why don't you?

I've asked you a lot of questions about performance feedback. Maybe you have some opinions, ideas, suggestions, insights about the topic that my questions didn't give you a chance to provide. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the general topic that we've been discussing (feedback)?
ADDRESS

September 22, 1991

Dear _____:

Enclosed is the transcript of our interview on July 17. Would you please review the transcript, note any additions/comments that you would like to make, and return a copy of the transcript with your notations to me? If you don't have anything to comment about, just write a note to that effect. Also enclosed is a brief questionnaire that will provide me with background information on the persons interviewed. Would you also please complete the questionnaire and return that along with the transcript?

You'll notice that the transcript includes a lot of information that clues the reader as to the identity of the person being interviewed. I have not eliminated any of that information in the transcript because there are just too many references of that type. If I eliminated them, it would be difficult to understand the gist of what was being said. However, I will not be sharing the transcript with anyone, except that members of my Doctoral Committee may want to check my work. Any quotations that I use in the dissertation, however, will not include information which reveals the identity of the person being quoted.

As I may have mentioned during the interview, I may want to do a follow-up interview with some of the people from whom I interviewed. I won't know with whom I'll be doing follow-up interviews until I've analyzed the data. At this point, I'm still transcribing some of the tapes. If I do find that it would be helpful to do a follow-up interview with you, I hope that you'll be willing to help me once again. The follow-up interviews more than likely would not occur until October.

I enjoyed meeting you and hearing about your ideas on the topic of performance feedback. I also appreciated your cooperation and candor during the interview. Thanks so much for your time and your willingness to share information with me.

Sincerely,

Karen M. Reese
RESEARCH WITH ___ ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Follow-up Questionnaire

NAME: ____________________________  SEX: _________

TITLE: ____________________________  AGE: _________

NUMBER OF YEARS EMPLOYED BY ___: __________

NUMBER OF YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION: __________

TOTAL YEARS IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION AT ANY SCHOOL: ________

POSITION HELD PREVIOUS TO CURRENT POSITION: _______________________

HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED: ____________________________________________

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY:

# OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF YOU SUPERVISE: _________

# OF CLERICAL STAFF YOU SUPERVISE: _________

# OF OTHER STAFF YOU SUPERVISE: _________

Please return your completed questionnaire as soon as possible to:

Karen M. Reese
409 East Ridge St.
Marquette, MI 49855
Definitions of Code Words

AMOUNT. How much feedback to staff receive? Each time a subject made a statement about the amount or frequency of information he received regarding how he was performing his job, the instance was coded "amount."

BARRIERS. What barriers are there to staff seeking feedback? What are the barriers to supervisors providing feedback? Each time a subject mentioned a behavior or stated a perception that could possibly be detrimental to the sharing of performance related information, the reference was coded "barriers."

BEHAVIORAL CHANGE. Do staff change their work behavior as the result of receiving feedback about their work? Whenever a subject mentioned having received or given information about work performance, the researcher asked a follow-up question, if necessary, to obtain information about whether or not any change in behavior was made or observed. Such instances were coded "beh change."

CHANGE ABOUT. How did supervisors and subordinates respond to the question: Is there anything that you would like to change about the feedback that you receive or give? Subjects responses were coded "change ab." Also, any information that subjects volunteered concerning how they would like to change the information that they receive was coded "change ab."

CIRCUMSTANCE. Under what circumstances do staff receive feedback? Whenever a subject provided any contextual information about the situation in which feedback was received or given, the reference was coded "circumstan."

COMMITMENT. Any time a supervisor mentioned the importance they placed on providing feedback to others, the segment was coded "commitment."

COMFORT WITH. Whenever a subject said something that could be an expression of his level of comfort or discomfort with giving or receiving feedback, the segment was coded "comfort wi."

ENOUGH Do subordinate staff assess that they receive enough feedback? Do supervisory staff indicate that they provide enough feedback? Any time either a subject expressed a judgment about the amount of feedback that had occurred, the instance was coded "enough."

Initially, three code words were used: enough, enough given, and enough received.
EXPECT SUPERVISOR. Subordinate staff were asked what they expect from a supervisor. If the response mentioned direction, goal setting, feedback, and related terms, the reference was coded "expect sup."

FEEDBACK GIVING SUPERVISOR. Under what circumstances do supervisors give feedback? Any time that a supervisor mentioned giving performance information to a subordinate, the instance was coded "fb giv s."

FEEDBACK GIVING SUBORDINATE. Under what circumstances do supervisors report that subordinates sought feedback from them? Any time a supervisor mentioned that a subordinate asked for performance information, the segment was coded "fb giv sb."

FEEDBACK NOT PERCEIVED. When a subject described a situation where information was available regarding how he was performing, but the information was not recognized as a source of feedback, this segment was coded "fb n perc."

FEEDBACK SEEKING. Do staff seek feedback? How do staff seek feedback? Any instance that was mentioned that involved a person asking for performance related information or trying to find ways to determine the quality of his work, this instance was coded "fb seeking."

FEEL GOOD. When a subject indicated that information that was received regarding performance made them feel pleased, happy, good, or a related term, the code "feel good" was used.

FORMAL EVALUATION. Each reference to the formal evaluation, or lack of a formal evaluation, made by either subordinates or supervisors, was coded "formal eva."

FREQUENCY STAFF. Any reference by the subject to the frequency of the contact between supervisor and subordinate was coded "freq staff."

FUNCTIONS. Subordinate staff were asked what their roles were at the university. Their descriptions of job responsibilities were coded "functions."

ID. In order to protect the identity of the interviewee, a code letter was substituted for the person's name throughout the transcript; however, it was necessary for subsequent transcript identification to retain one instance of the person's name and title in
the transcript.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY. Whenever the supervisor talked about a situation that the researcher concluded would have been a good opportunity to provide a subordinate with feedback, and the supervisor did not provide feedback, the segment was coded "missed opp."

PERFORMANCE. Do supervisors perceive that feedback improves work performance? Any references to supervisors believing that there is a relationship between performance and feedback were coded "performanc."

PLANNED FEEDBACK. Do supervisors provide feedback with planned intent or is the giving of feedback incidental? Any information provided by a supervisor that concerned strategies, systems, or deliberate actions for informing the employee about how his work was assessed was coded "planned fb."

PREFERRED DELIVERY. Do staff have any preferences regarding the ways in which they would like to receive feedback? Any mention of how a subordinate staff would like to be given feedback, or how a supervisor would prefer to give it, were coded "pref del."

PRIDE. Several subjects made statements about the pride that they took in their work. Such references were coded "pride."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Any comment made by either a supervisor or a subordinate regarding the importance of professional development was coded "prof dev."

ROLE SUPERVISOR. How does the supervisor see his role? Is feedback mentioned as part of that role? Any acknowledgement that providing feedback is a supervisory role was coded "role super."

SELF-DOUBT. Any statement by either a supervisor or a subordinate that the researcher thought could be an expression of self-doubt was coded "self-doubt."

SOURCES - SUPERVISOR. Any time that a supervisor mentioned a way in which he gave feedback to a subordinate or received feedback on a subordinate's performance from other sources, the segment was coded "sources - s."

SOURCES - SUBORDINATE. Any time that a subordinate mentioned a way in which he received information about
his performance was coded "sources - sb."

SUBORDINATE. The code "subordinat" was used to identify references to the number of subordinates a supervisor had.

TIME SUPERVISOR. The code "time super" was used to identify responses to the question: How much time do you spend in supervisory activities?

TIMING OF FEEDBACK. Any references by supervisors concerning the amount of time that elapsed between being aware of something regarding which he wished to provide feedback and actually providing the feedback were coded "timing." Also included under this code were instances mentioned by subordinates regarding issues of timing.

TRUST. Statements that the researcher perceived to be related to trust between a supervisor and his subordinates or a subordinate and his supervisor were coded "trust."

TYPES OF FEEDBACK. Is the feedback received by staff task specific? Is it process or outcome oriented? Do staff receive feedback on their communication and interaction style? Any segments that provided these kinds of information were coded "type."

TYPICAL DAY. Subordinates' responses to the request by the researcher to describe their typical work day were coded "typical da."

USEFULNESS OF FEEDBACK. Subordinate staff were asked to respond to the question: What kinds of feedback do you find to be the most useful to you? Their responses were coded "usefulness." Also included under this code were assessments of the usefulness of feedback that were volunteered in response to other questions or probes by the researcher.

VALENCE. Whenever the researcher could identify an example of feedback that was provided by a subject as either positive or negative, or an opinion was shared about positive versus negative feedback, these segments were coded "valence."

OTHER. Information that the researcher concluded did not fit one of the pre-determined codes, but had the possibility of being relevant to the topic and was mentioned by only one or two subjects, was coded "other."
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REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

Personal Reflections on the Research Process
April 1991 - August 1992

April 16 Things are coming together well for the study at X. President A. called the president at X and wrote a letter supporting my request to do research at X - nice of him to take the time to help me connect. Lyle also talked with his counterpart - he seems willing to serve as my link for entry. Things are falling into place! Need to work on the letter, consent form, interview guides, etc.

April 18 Talked to my liaison at X. Very helpful.

May 23 Received a letter today from the Institutional Review Board at X approving my research project. Talked to Harry and Carol this week. They're being really helpful. Carol said she'd send me info about X, including an organizational chart.

Did two of my pilot interviews today. I wonder if interviewing people I don't know will be different - easier? more difficult? I really appreciate the help these four staff are giving me. I have some questions to ask Zoe when I see her: Worry that I may have been leading. Do I transcribe all the "ahs" and "ums?" Is it OK to use my active listening skills - paraphrasing and feeding back what I hear? Some of my trial subjects were very verbal. Is there a problem if I don't cover all the questions with each subject? I'm finding that each interview takes different twists - depending on the subject and how my interest is piqued.

June 4 Received notice today that my research protocol has been approved by the HSIRB. Now I can call Carol and talk about interview dates.

June 5 Met with Zoe today; good to put a face with the person I've been talking with by telephone. Discussed my practice interviews; went over the interview guides in detail. Talked a lot about the line of questioning and phrasing and transitions; helped me conceptualize the study. Emphasized collecting down-to-earth info; use earthy words; stay away from using the term feedback. Very helpful session. Talked to Zoe about a problem: my liaison sent letters out to forty administrative staff saying I'd be contacting them for interviews and encouraging them to participate in the project. (Zoe had recommended doing about ten interviewees, and interviewing a subject more than once if useful.) We agreed that in view of the letter going out to everyone, I should interview all who agree to participate.

June 7 The letters and consent forms came back from Printing
Services today. Better get them out in the mail first thing in the morning - time's tight. Thank God for mail merge and computers.

June 10 Talked to Carol earlier this week. She told me where I'd be interviewing and how to get there. She's arranging for a key to the room for me. I've been calling participants to schedule interview times. So far so good!

June 13 Received several calls from X today. Some people must be apprehensive - wanted to know how to prepare for interview. One took issue with a word on the consent form - conflicted with the letter. Some can't interview this month, but said they would schedule for next month.

June 17 Interesting. Three people I called today don't want to participate. All report to the same person.

June 18 Did my first set of interviews today (4). Was a little nervous when the first one scheduled didn't show. Called his office, and his secretary said he was sick. (Wondered if he really was, or was I being "put off.") Felt relieved when the other four showed. First subject was really an easy person to interview - very open - interested in the topic - professional training may be a factor. The second one was very verbal - nervous though - actually said he scheduled it as early as possible "to get it over with!" The third subject seemed to enjoy being interviewed. Asked to talk with me sometime about common work experiences. Also asked me to turn the recorder off while he discussed his previous supervisor. Didn't recognize that a lot of the questionnaire data he collected was information about the job he was doing. Incident about the hockey player gives me something to think about. Also food for thought is his description of how he was viewed by his previous supervisor. Contrasted his current supervisor with his previous one - can see why he likes the new one. Not seeing him very much must be better than the negative experience he had with the previous one. The last one for the day: warm smile; seemed comfortable; was able to discuss in detail the work flow information in his job; seemed to rely a lot on absence of complaints.

I didn't realize how exhausting it would be to interview all day - intense - really had to "be there" for them. Worried that I may be have been too responsive, leading perhaps. The tape recorder didn't seem to be as much of a problem as I thought - we both seemed to ignore it pretty well after the first minutes - except for when the info was quite disclosing - the eyes seem to shift to the recorder then. Decided to tell the subjects that I'd send them a copy of the typewritten transcript for their review - I think this was a smart thing to say, as it seemed to make some of them more trusting of the process. (Being able to read exactly what I had down on paper must have made them feel that I wouldn't be misrepresenting
June 19  I can't believe it - I did six interviews today. Decided to interview academic department heads as "supervisors" after talking with one of the subjects. I'll re-evaluate after doing a few interviews. The first person said he only had an hour, but stayed longer. Very open person - shared a lot, but seemed to want to talk more about the nature of his job than the ways he gets info about his performance. Expressed disappointment in the way his job has grown - doesn't seem to see himself as competent as others see him. The lack of advanced degree seems to bother him. (Wasn't pleased with the way I handled the questions during the interview - interviewee willing to give more of his time, if I need it.) Asked me to turn off the recorder for a while to discuss a "personnel problem." Second interviewee went on and on about some of his problems with supervising difficult staff, but it was interesting and clued me to the frustration and draining nature of problem employees. (Didn't I already know that from my own experience!) Dealing with student complaints is a time-consuming and stressful part of the job. Pleased to hear he took it seriously. Third interviewee - much more formal and stiff - but shared a lot of feedback information. He really does some good things with his staff. Obviously somewhat resentful of what his supervisor doesn't do. Kind of stiff maybe - but I don't think I'd mind working for him. The fourth interviewee - what an interesting person. Had a list of written questions; we talked about them before the interview; seemed reassured how confidentiality concerns would be handled. What he does on the job reminds me of what Walt used to do for us. His feelings about his supervisor come through. Proximity not a blessing for him. Fifth person very articulate; energetic, but soft-spoken (worried tape might be a problem). Eye contact almost intense; style of speech formal (stilted?) Very impressive person - commitment, energy, knowledge all evident. Wonder if his zeal is a turn-off for some of his colleagues and staff! Admiration versus resentment?? This last interview was the most difficult I've done so far. Arrived late; had to be called and reminded he had the interview. Strayed from the topic - really seemed to have his own agenda. Not hostile or anything - just couldn't seem to keep on track. Wonder what I should have done differently - could have been the late afternoon and the position of sixth interview, I suppose. I find myself using subordinate questions with supervisors when we have time - OK, I guess - all are subordinate to someone else.

June 20  Five interviews scheduled for today. Good that I'm an early morning person - first one at 8 a.m. First interviewee role not that "administrative." Seemed a little intimidated by the idea of being interviewed, but very cooperative and tried to respond seriously to all questions. Interview two a very interesting one in view of the supervisory style and accountability measures used (of special
interest to me because of my background). Does the "right" things. Wonder if he's as good as he talks. A little pompous?? Third interviewee - verbal; spoke passionately about quality instruction and his own disappointments with college teachers. Collegiality, mentoring, and professional development big issues for him. Expressed thanks for the interview - said talking about feedback made him realize a lot of things he should and could be doing. Fourth interview - a long one; moments of sharing involved long explanations. Seemed to need to talk though - cathartic?? Reporting lines atypical. Personnel problems (both up and down) a major focus of the interview. Seemed to be feeling some professional and personal uncertainty in his life - could be affecting work relationships. (Didn't follow the interview guide as much with him - unique situation.) The last interview of the day was tough: felt a little tired and person talked fast, strayed from topic, and was an "elaborator." Very revealing in his comments - there's some supervisory feedback here and he doesn't have a clue! Can't believe all the time this subject was taking to try to salvage an employee who it seems should have been terminated a long time back - may indicate some more pervasive supervision/management problems.

June 25 Katrina began typing transcripts earlier this week. Much more time intensive that I imagined. Some of the tapes not as clear as I'd hoped - especially more soft-spoken subjects. Should have checked the quality of the tapes following the first day of interviews. Need to follow-up on my interview schedule for July. Several calls to make - haven't heard from some people. In one follow-up call was told that he wouldn't be participating. Said he'd like to, but he was told that "it might not be in his best interest to participate." Also in the reporting line of others who aren't planning to participate. I've been thinking about the interviews so far - surprised that so many people aren't being evaluated; liaison said they had a formal evaluation system, and yet many of those interviewed are negative about the process and some haven't been evaluated in more than 20 years of employment. Seems to tie to reporting lines. Also noticed that more feedback exists than they recognize. Emphasis seems to be on following up on complaints - and, if no one says anything, I must be doing OK. President is most often mentioned as someone who got back to a person with a thank-you or a positive comment.

July 15 Five interviews today. Pleased that subject who was sick last trip was able to re-schedule. An interesting mix of subjects today. First one -- matter of fact; presented a lot of work flow and external checks sources of information. No formal evaluation - would like one, and yet doesn't want one; intimidated by the idea. Second interview very interesting - supervisor of some subordinates already interviewed - different perspectives than they had; talked fast and had nervous energy; very disclosing. Third interview - proximity
an advantage - close observation of staff and interaction regarding work tasks almost daily; does formal evaluations and tries to develop objectives with his staff. Fourth interview - a background different from many of the others; not very complimentary about supervisor or accountability within X. Seems to put a priority on staff development and uses his own plus the university's evaluation form. Fifth interview - a little lofty in tone and contributions; obviously has given previous thought and attention to staff feedback; a cynical view of evaluation process and his supervisor.

July 16 Only did four interviews today, although five were scheduled. First actual "no show." First interviewee shared general info about X and perspectives on staff and the evaluation process. Very satisfied with both the formal and informal feedback he receives; objectives and semi-annual evaluation; experienced and knowledgeable; confident in manner. The next staff member plays several roles within X - client feedback mentioned a lot; also values other staff feedback. Nothing unusual about manner. Interview three - unique; has played various roles; really reports to more than one person, but functions independently. Uses data a lot as feedback; pride in accomplishments. Seemed a little disparaging about leadership. Fourth interview - a change of pace; academic department head; uses data and external sources; talked about staff development and a personnel problem in his area. Seemed very comfortable during the interview, but may have been putting an especially positive "face" on her contributions.

During lunch break today went to the library - wanted to follow-up on the article someone mentioned - about faculty rating administrative staff. Found the article and copied it - top level not complimented by faculty - Board members' quotes in paper reflect anger about the ratings.

July 17 Had a follow-up meeting with a subject - just to talk about common experiences. Took a tour of some of the buildings - not too impressed by the disarray in one of the buildings; especially interesting in view of interviews I've had. First interviewee had been evaluated twice in many years; would really like to be. Had some unique ways of knowing he was doing a good job - external; self-generated feedback. Second interview - high physical activity during interview; maybe nervous; maybe just style. Talked fast too. Seemed pretty honest in talking about mistakes he's made as a supervisor. Last interview also very interesting as I've interviewed several in his reporting line; his perceptions don't match with theirs in some ways; almost paternalistic?? (staff seemed loyal to him; he gives them time; doesn't punish them for mistakes). Curious about what I was finding; persistent. Had to call him to remind him about the interview; my sense was that he really didn't want to participate, but didn't know how to avoid it in view of my
follow-up call. Was able to schedule an interview with the special informant this trip. Didn't want me to record it. Impressed with what he does with and for his staff. What he talks, he obviously does, as there's a match with the perceptions of his subordinates whom I've interviewed.

August 15 Had a set-back with the transcriptions. Katrina discovered two interviews were incomplete. From what I could tell, in one case, the tape must have ended and I didn't notice, and the second, I must have taped over part of one person's interview. I wrote to both subjects, sent them a transcript with my summary (from notes) of the missing segments, and asked them to fill in as much as they good of the missing information. Was I embarrassed!

September 12 The last two months have been hectic with the opening of the fall semester. I thought I'd be further along with getting the tapes transcribed. I've been going over the transcripts Katrina's done and comparing them with the tape when something doesn't make sense. Katrina's not being familiar with the jargon has made for some amusing phrases. Wont' be able to use Katrina after this week; probably won't hire anyone else. (She's already put in about 125 hours - and she's probably completed less than half the tapes!) Prefer not to have "too many fingers in the pie;" also don't want to erode confidentiality. I'll probably do the rest myself. It'll take time, but will give me another way of reviewing the data. Decided to mail the transcripts to subjects (as I said I would during the interviews) for confirmation and comments as each is completed.

December 8 Well, I've finished the transcripts and all have been sent out to subjects. Having taken notes during the interviews really helped when the volume of the tape recording made it difficult to distinguish what was being said. Sometimes I had to play the tape back several times. Sending the transcripts to the subjects for review was a good move - not only did it seem to make them more trusting of the process, but it provides a check of those parts of the tape which were difficult to hear. I'll bet some of them (the subjects) were wondering if I'd forgotten them. Hope to find time over the Christmas break to begin data analysis.

January 15 Did a view summaries of subjects' interviews over Christmas. Called Zoe several days ago to see if I was on the right track. She told me she'd like me to use a computer software package to do data analysis. My initial reaction was disappointment - felt like another set-back. Got the information from Zoe and ordered Ethnograph. Will have to wait until it arrives to continue.

April 27 Well I've proven I can learn a software program using a manual - something I've always avoided - much prefer for someone to "talk me through it." All my files have been
converted to Ethnograph files now and I have almost all of them coded. On Zoe's advice developed operational definitions for the code words. These went through several drafts as I continued to code the data. I'm beginning to "know" this data - can recognize faces when I see the letter I've assigned the subject. Find myself thinking about the data and certain things subjects said at the oddest moments. Something will happen at work, and I'll be reminded of one of the subjects.

May 20 Applied to NMU for a Special Purpose Grant and it was approved. Now I'll have two days each week plus weekends to work on the big D. I feel relieved - maybe there's a chance I can come close to finishing the D this summer! I've printed all of the coded data by code word and according to supervisors and subordinates. Reams and reams of paper. The coding sure has helped. I can't imagine having had to use the "cut and paste" and "file folder" methods described in the qualitative textbooks. I've been reviewing the data, and reviewing it. Trying to get a handle on how to write it up. As a novice, I wonder how much I should use my hunches and experience. Made a chart by research question, showing which code words seem to provide data for each question. It's a starting point!

June 29 Sent Chapter III to my committee for review. Also sent a sketchy draft of Chapter IV - it needs a lot of work. Included some of the appendices I've been working on. Attended a seminar put on by Rosalie Torres concerning qualitative research. Talking with her helped me better understand what to put in the body of the D and what to put in the appendices. I've been jotting down some marginal notes and looking for relationships across subjects and themes. For example, found it interesting that all of the subjects for which I had segments coded "self-doubt" were females. Also starting to see that the nature of the staff (work history almost exclusively at X ) is a factor in how they view performance, feedback, and supervisory roles.

Feeling more comfortable now about using hunches - I've been checking them against the data. Found that more than females have self-doubt - still much more so the females, but some males, too. Also noticing that staff who have the most to say about work flow feedback are in such areas as business operations. Staff in program and service areas seem to use client questionnaires and discussions with other staff for feedback on their programs - not necessarily more personalized feedback, however. Discussions with Zoe continue to be very helpful; very insightful. Zoe's suggestion to consider a different way of organizing the chapter and perhaps collapsing the seven questions under part one fit with my own sense of what I wasn't liking. Collapsing the seven to three questions eliminated a lot of redundancy. I like it much better. Also think I should go back through the transcripts and check them against the coding to be sure I haven't missed anything.
Doing so will be time-consuming but reassuring.

**July 24** FAXED a better draft of Chapter IV to Zoe today. I'm starting to get a feel for how to do this! Feeling better about this draft. (The extra pressure from deciding to shoot for defense by the end of August has its good and bad sides. I've feeling pressured, but I'm also using every available moment to write and re-write.) The subjects and their data are very familiar. I wish I had had gotten out of bed a few nights to write notes when insights came to me as I was falling asleep. Too tired, though. There's some really interesting "stuff" that I won't be using; e.g., data concerning how supervisors handle personnel matters; problems subordinates have with supervisors. They do help in gaining insights into how staff feel and think about their jobs.

**July 29** Talked with Jim about Chapter V. His insights about the culture at X were very helpful. Well Chapters IV and V (except for small segment of V are out to committee). I'm sure there'll be revisions - but I'm feeling pretty good about my progress. Time to do some further revision on Chapters I and II.

At times during this process I felt "frozen" in my ability to move forward and, at other times, I felt energized by the ideas that were coming into my thoughts so fast I couldn't keep up on the keyboard. I hated the former, and loved the latter. Sometimes I was amazed at how much I remembered about the content of the data by subject. When writing the conclusions and recommendations for practitioners, the ideas just flowed.
Appendix B

Raw and Interpreted Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sbj.</th>
<th>Work Flow/Objective Measures</th>
<th>People Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Low default rate.</td>
<td>Letters from students: they write back; they say they like the way I deal with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The balance for one report matches another report.</td>
<td>My supervisor &quot;lets me do my own job...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A parent wrote a letter of complaint to the President once; I was called upstairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other people have confidence in me; I can feel it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation forms are completed by clients (students) each term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor's review of written material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students follow my advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff send me thank you notes and ask me to be on a committee or task group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Periodic meetings with my supervisor where we talk about a program that just happened or something that's upcoming, or he might ask about a complaint that he's heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Computer program flags errors and reports balance.</td>
<td>My boss says I'm doing a good job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People complain if an error is made.</td>
<td>Reads body language and other nonverbal cues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Number of participants; number of graduates.</td>
<td>People seem to like [the program].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revenue exceeds expenses.</td>
<td>Comments from other staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and clients (students).

**H** Repeat business.

- Feedback verbalized by the customer or it could be in the form of a written evaluation by the customer.
- Lack of complaints from customers and from other departments.

Personal monitoring of the work; uses a checklist.

- Letters sent to the President expressing satisfaction with service.

**J** Enrollment figures.

- Positive comments made to others that are then shared with him.
- Contacts by his supervisor and at times the President.

Sets goals and measures them.

- Recognition from an outside source (professional association).

**K**

- Formal evaluation (once).

- Positive comments and complaints from student clients and faculty.

- Students' facial expressions when they come in for service.

- Informal comments from supervisor.

**O**

- Direct feedback from his supervisor or staff from another department on a specific task.

- A call from the President or a "one-sided memo" about
Schedules are met. Measured against timelines on a computer project.
Checks on accuracy built into the work flow.
Adherence to set procedures; audit reports.
Sets personal work productivity goals.

Comparisons with informal benchmarks based on other institutions.
Self-monitoring due to years of work experience.
"Win/loss" record.

Attendance figures.
Number of members.
Enrollment in programs.
Students' scores on professional exams.

something that wasn't done properly.
Thank you calls or notes from students or parents.
Students stop by with comments or questions.
Complaints from other staff.
Other staff use as a resource person.

Favorable comment in accreditation review.
Complaints from other staff.
Student evaluations of instruction.
Staff evaluation of programs.
Feedback from other offices and from external sources.
Referrals for service.
Client evaluation forms for certain programs.
Compliments on students by "outsiders."
Words of appreciation from the President.
Student evaluations.
Advice and comments from advisory groups.

Informal indications from higher administration signifying approval.

Informal positive comments from other staff.

Y Cost comparisons.

Revenue generated.

Lack of complaints.

Requests for additional programs.
### Sources of Feedback for Subordinate Staff and the Circumstances by Which They Become Aware

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subj.</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>Reports check with database.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External source (Other)</td>
<td>Letters of commendation regarding quality of reports from government agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>Contacts him because of a complaint received from a student or parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Senses others have confidence in his work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Has good relationships with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Send letters of appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Noninterference with his work; doesn't complain or correct; has done one formal evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>The absence of any negative articles about him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Stop in to tell him there's a problem; invite him to participate in X repeatedly; people seek him out for his opinion or to help with a task or important committee; send him thank-you notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Complete semester evaluation forms for department and staff; complete evaluation forms after sponsored programs; thank in person for help they received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Survey data collected by other departments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Reviews and revises written work; if there's a problem calls him and says he wants to talk with him; asks him to make an appointment; calls and shares a compliment he's heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Will generate warnings if errors are being processed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Reports balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Will complain if errors are made; people rely on his database.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Comes and says he's doing a good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Clients (students and parents)</td>
<td>Watches facial expressions at programs; receives occasional positive calls and letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Conducts surveys regarding programs; keeps records of numbers in attendance and revenue produced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Calls from people who disagree with his decisions; people who volunteer a compliment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Observes programs and assesses their quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subordinates</td>
<td>Comments regarding his supervision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Annual evaluation; reads supervisor's body language and nuances in his communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>Verbal or written evaluation by the customer following an event; clients coming back for services repeatedly; absence of complaints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>Complimentary notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Come in and tell him directly if they have a concern; complaints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Works from a checklist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Feedback is rare; a formal evaluation is planned for later in the summer—first one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Relies heavily on student enrollment numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External source (other)</td>
<td>Recognition from a professional association for a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>Direct calls from the president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Monthly meetings to share information; quarterly to &quot;kind of evaluate.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Some compliments; absence of complaints mostly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Absence of complaints best source, but gets compliments on a daily basis, too; facial expressions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Informal feedback; just stops in or telephones. Has had one formal evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>A call from the president or a &quot;one-sided memo&quot; from someone with a complaint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Feedback on a product that was produced; e.g., publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students and parents</td>
<td>Receives letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Will make suggestions regarding something that he gives him to review; an annual evaluation is planned for later in the summer--first one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Are schedules met and are reports run in a timely and accurate manner? Checks built into the work itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External sources (other)</td>
<td>Review by auditors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Complaints or absence of complaints.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Peers defer to his leadership; use him as a resource person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Just within myself; personal goals; evaluate the practices with regard to &quot;all the rules.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>An occasional comment from the boss.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>President will give him an atta-boy regarding a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Complaints or absence of complaints.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Set objectives and review performance semi-annually (annual evaluation); atta-boys once in a while for projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Attendance figures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>Comment from president or a formal letter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Absence of complaints.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and parents</td>
<td>Success of students after they've left the university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Enrollment in programs; students' scores on graduate exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External source (other)</td>
<td>Advisory committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External source (other)</td>
<td>Reports by accrediting bodies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapevine</td>
<td>Indirectly hears things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>President expresses satisfaction with program; &quot;thumbs-up&quot; sign from a V.P.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Compliments from people he respects; reads facial expressions when making group presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Sets goals and objectives and knows when he accomplishes them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Mostly telephone calls and some notes; course evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Higher administrator</td>
<td>Thank him for bringing matters to their attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>One person requested a special training session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>Getting a raise in pay every year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Acknowledges the heavy workload and that the staff are doing a good job; his interest in what they do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supervisors speaking as subordinates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Other staff</th>
<th>Values good working relationships with most departments and pays attention to any sources of conflict.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Monitors ways in which his ideas and suggestions are heeded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subordinates</td>
<td>The supervisor asked faculty to evaluate I and then shared the feedback with him; comment on his leadership and decisions quite freely, both when they agree and disagree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Consultations; annual evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Co-mentoring relationship which involved sharing performance-related information about teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subj.</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Receives feedback from his supervisor that has been provided by his subordinate staff; the feedback is given informally and sometimes is unfairly channeled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Does an annual evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>Asks indirectly and informally for feedback—&quot;sneaks in the back door.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Asks indirectly and informally for feedback—&quot;sneaks in the back door.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subordinates</td>
<td>Gets feedback from them as part of the evaluations that he does with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Grapevine</td>
<td>Informal feedback is provided through relationships within the grapevine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher administrators</td>
<td>President provides information; e.g., compliments him on a presentation or report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>A self-critic who can &quot;pick up on those things where I have screwed up quicker than anybody else.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Provides some information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Source of Feedback by Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>Y</th>
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Note. 1 = formal organization, 2 = co-workers, 3 = supervisors, 4 = task, 5 = self, 6 = clients, and 7 = other.
### Source of Feedback by Subject

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**Note.** 1 = formal organization, 2 = co-workers, 3 = supervisors, 4 = task, 5 = self, 6 = clients, and 7 = other.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>No - Says he has enough information, but his overall interview would indicate otherwise. Seems confident that the boss would tell him if he wasn't doing a good job, but would like more positive feedback and a formal evaluation. (Researcher's assessment: Not enough feedback.)</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Yes - &quot;Probably sometimes more than I want. But, there's so many different people that can (pause) evaluate me.&quot; Later C stated: &quot;I guess I would, I wouldn't mind having a formal, written evaluation process...but I guess there's a part of all of us that does like to see something down in black and white that we can actually look at and say: 'This is what I've done. This is where I want to go. This is what I need to work on for next year.'&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Yes - The nature of D's work is that he receives feedback from employees promptly if he makes errors. He talked extensively about the few errors that are made.</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Yes - E is provided multiple sources of information, including a formal evaluation.</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>No - &quot;...feedback is rare.&quot; H volunteered the following as an add-on to a related question: &quot;Well, I don't know if I should say this or not. (Pause.) I have been here just short of ___ years [considerable in number], and I'll knock ya out with this statement. I've never been evaluated. (Pause.) I'm not upset, but it's, it's incredulous; I'm sure. But I flip it around, and I make humor out of it, so my current statement is: 'I hope I can get to retirement and never know what I was supposed to do while I was here.'&quot; &quot;Well, I'd have to say, 'No,' because there basically isn't any feedback.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Yes - &quot;Actually, probably yes and no. For one thing, because I set goals for myself....I measure what I do here by the number of students that we graduate....&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Hesitant Yes - &quot;Yes, I think so.&quot; In commenting on the informal feedback that he receives from his supervisor, the verbal &quot;pat on the back,&quot; K said: &quot;I think you may go three months without it on the job.&quot;</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>No - &quot;No.&quot; O felt, however, that in time, he would get more feedback from his supervisor as his supervisor gained experience in the position.</td>
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</table>
P No - P did not provide any specific examples of information that he had received, other than that he recalled that his supervisor commented once, "that was good," in reference to a deadline that had been set.

U Yes - U commented that employees had told him that they would like "some forum to sit down with the supervisor, maybe that the supervisor would explain why so and so's getting 6% and they're getting 5, or whatever the case may be." For himself, he said: "I guess that I've got enough formal and informal feedback that I've not had to be concerned about it at all." U is formally evaluated.

V Hesitant Yes - V commented that he sees his supervisor on a casual basis a couple of times a week, and on a formal basis, never. He also indicated that the contact is usually initiated by him. When asked if he was comfortable with that, V responded: "Ah (pause) yah."

W No - "No, I don't feel that I get enough at all. As I mentioned, there's no formal procedure at all....No. I've never had [a formal evaluation]....And sometimes you wonder whether you are; you may be performing well, but you wonder whether you're performing the types of activities, ya know, that are in the best interests maybe of the University. You think you are, but I, I, in my own experience up here, I, I certainly wish that there had been a, some sort of a system where you could sit down and map out some plans and objectives for the coming year, and then periodic review sessions as to how you're doing."

Y No - In reference to formal evaluation, Y said: "I wish it would happen more often." In the considerable years that Y has been employed, he has been evaluated twice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Regarding Subordinates</th>
<th>Regarding Themselves</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not much contact with supervisor. Initiates contact twice a year to provide a &quot;state of the state.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>F did not comment on his own situation.</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>No. Has little contact with his supervisor. Does not have a formal evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>We need to do a lot more.</td>
<td>Not as many as I would like. Formal opportunities for evaluation (for my employee category) are less than ideal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>L did not comment on his own situation.</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No. I've never had a supervisor sit in on one of my classes.</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No. Resents the way some feedback comes to his attention.</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Constant feedback.</td>
<td>No. Not formally evaluated.</td>
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<td>RR</td>
<td>I think so.</td>
<td>I think, generally, yes. Expressed satisfaction with the formal process used by his supervisor, that of setting goals and assessing progress on them.</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>I'm always questioning. I don't think that I get any. Only when it's self-generated.</td>
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</table>
Although he makes a deliberate effort to provide frequent feedback to his staff, he acknowledges that he doesn't do it often enough.

Yes.

Does annual evaluations on his staff.

Expressed comfort that his staff is getting enough information.

Certainly I would appreciate more; I have to go on assumptions.

X did not comment regarding the feedback he receives.

Gets a lot of public feedback, mostly in the form of complaints; perhaps once a year the President or my superior will say he's doing a good job.

Yah, I think so.
### BARRIERS TO SUPERVISORY FEEDBACK (BY SUPERVISOR)

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<td>Emotional response</td>
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<td>Distance afterwards.</td>
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<td>Insufficient opportun.</td>
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<td>to observe performance.</td>
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<td>Personal anxiety in handling difficult issues (litigation).</td>
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<td>Lack of power (can only persuade faculty).</td>
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<td>Complainant wants to remain anonymous.</td>
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<td>Uncomfortable giving positive feedback.</td>
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<td>Doesn't like to directly confront; uses another person with similar problem; increases ineffectiveness of the person if more anxious.</td>
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<td>Wants to maintain good relations.</td>
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<td>Past failures to have effect a change in behavior.</td>
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<td>Formal evaluation not required by supervisor.</td>
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<td>Doesn't effect compensation.</td>
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<td>Have to handle each staff member differently.</td>
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<td>Subord. don't see sup. having enough knowledge or experience.</td>
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<td>Drains one's energy.</td>
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<td>It takes a lot of time.</td>
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<td>Doubt about one's assessment.</td>
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<td>Hard to develop trust with the staff.</td>
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<td>Employees don't care about being formally evaluated.</td>
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Usefulness of Feedback—By Subordinate

B There isn't anybody who dislikes me.
C Feedback from students.
D Absence of complaints.
E Enrollment data; revenue generated.
H My own knowledge that everything is in order.
J Enrollment data.
K Comments by students.
O Feedback from students.
P Myself: meeting goals and deadlines.
U My own experience and knowledge.
V Feedback from students.
W Enrollment data; revenue generated.
Y Other staff [as clients].
Appendix C

Staff Characteristics
## Staff Characteristics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Prof.</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Yrs. in position</th>
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Appendix D

Approval Letter From Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, Western Michigan University, and Approval Letter From Institutional Review Board of Institution at Which Research Was Conducted
Date: June 4, 1991
To: Keren M. Reese
From: Mary Anne Bunde, Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number: 91-05-28

Mary Anne Bunde

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "Performance Feedback in an Organizational Setting," has been approved under the exempt category of review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

cc: Eugene Thompson, Educational Leadership

Approval Termination: June 4, 1992
May 28, 1991

Karen M. Reese
409 East Ridge Street
Marquette, MI 49855 University

Dear Ms. Reese:

Based upon your letter of May 20 in which you described the study you plan to do here at University, I approve the research as Chair of the Institutional Review Board under the expedited review process. If the project is followed as described, it will satisfy the exemption conditions of CFR Part 46, Sect. 46.101, paragraph (b).

Good luck in your research.

Sincerely,

Chairperson
Institutional Review Board

cc: IRB Members
BIBLIOGRAPHY


