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SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE FEEDBACK ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Taru Kurunsaari: Supervisor's Role in Fostering an Inclusive Feedback Environment
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Although inclusion is a key organizational goal, translating it into daily leadership practice remains challenging. Supervisors are essential to this process, yet there is limited understanding of how they practically enact inclusive behaviors. This study posits that continuous feedback environment provides a context for fostering inclusion because it provides supervisors frequent opportunities to balance employees' needs for both belongingness and uniqueness through everyday interactions.

The primary objective of this thesis is to explore inclusive feedback environment from the perspectives of team supervisors. This study examines how supervisors contribute to the formation of the environment and how they apply principles of inclusion in their everyday leadership practices. Moreover, this study aims to identify how supervisors adapt their feedback approaches to accommodate individual differences and diverse backgrounds.

The theoretical background of this thesis begins by exploring concepts of inclusion and inclusive leadership. It then examines feedback environment, highlighting individual differences in how feedback is received and the supervisor's role in facilitating it. The theoretical framework of this study integrates these two concepts, illustrating how the supervisor acts as the link that shapes both feedback environment and workplace inclusion.

This study is commissioned by a division in a global technology organization. The empirical data for the study was collected through eight semi-structured interviews with supervisors from the commissioning company. The data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with the help of MAXQDA software. The data was first coded into subcategories and then grouped into main categories: the supervisor's conceptualizations and role, fostering belongingness, and valuing uniqueness.

The findings revealed that supervisors conceptualized an inclusive feedback environment as one grounded in psychological safety, where employees could be authentic and exchange feedback regardless of their backgrounds. Supervisors viewed themselves as essential role models and facilitators, recognizing their responsibility in translating inclusion policies into daily actions. The primary challenges they faced included time constraints, structural barriers within the team, and emotional complexities associated with constructive feedback. Supervisors fostered belongingness by cultivating an open feedback climate, ensuring fair treatment, and facilitating participation. Simultaneously, they validated uniqueness by understanding their team members' individuality, tailoring feedback to individual needs, and demonstrating sensitivity to diverse backgrounds.

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it connects two separately studied concepts of workplace inclusion and feedback environment. The study also addresses a gap in inclusive leadership literature and shows how abstract policies can be translated into concrete daily actions. Additionally, the findings support critiques of standardized feedback, demonstrating that a one-size-fits-all approach fails to support genuine inclusion. Practically, the study provides guidelines for developing more inclusive feedback environments. Supervisors should personalize their feedback, reflect on their biases, show vulnerability, and facilitate daily interactions. To make this possible, organizations must support their supervisors with clear metrics, adequate resources, and combined training on both inclusion and feedback.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, inclusive leadership, feedback, feedback environment

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Purpose of using AI tools**:** Throughout the thesis process, several AI tools were used to support research and writing phases. Google Gemini Pro functioned as a support tool for brainstorming, refining research questions, and structuring content. It was also used for language editing and translating the Finnish interview quotes into English. For the literature chapter, Scopus AI helped identify relevant academic sources, while Google NotebookLM was used to summarize them. However, all articles were verified for their accuracy. Additionally, the automated transcription feature in Microsoft Teams generated the initial transcripts of the interview data. While AI tools were used for assistance, all final text was produced by the researcher. No AI-generated text was used directly.

Sections where AI tools were used: AI was utilized to support the scoping and refinement of the research focus in the Introduction (Chapter 1). In the Literature Review (Chapter 2), AI was used to assist in synthesizing and organizing articles. AI also supported the formulation and refinement of the interview questions. In the Findings and Conclusions (Chapters 4 and 5), AI was utilized to improve the structure and coherence of the text. Additionally, AI was used throughout the thesis for language revision and translation but especially for translating interview quotes from Finnish to English.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

As the workforce becomes increasingly diverse, inclusion has emerged as a central focus in research, prompting organizations to invest effort in HR policies and practices that not only manage diversity but also promote inclusion (Buengeler et al., 2018; Mor Barak et al., 2022). However, this shift underscores the fact that high diversity within an organization does not automatically result in an inclusive climate (Ashikali et al., 2021). Inclusion reflects a balance between two fundamental human needs, belongingness and uniqueness, as individuals seek both connection to a group and the ability to express their distinct identities and characteristics (Chung et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2011). Acknowledging this is critical, especially in teams, as they serve as the primary setting where inclusion is put into practice. As the most immediate work environment for employees, teams shape the daily interactions that drive employee engagement and performance (Ashikali et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2020; Randel, 2025).

Organizational training and policies alone are insufficient if they are not effectively enacted in everyday practice (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Therefore, building an inclusive climate requires intentional effort in daily work, making team supervisors critical actors in translating inclusion policies into action (Ashikali et al., 2021; Buengeler et al., 2018). One way for supervisors to promote inclusion within their teams is by adopting inclusive leadership behaviors. This leadership style has been shown to support psychological safety, encourage two-way interactions, and promote employees' willingness to speak up and share ideas (Katz et al., 2021; Qi et al., 2023; Randel et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022). However, despite the benefits, there is a limited understanding of how leadership behaviors aimed at improving inclusion translate into everyday practices (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

One promising yet underexplored avenue for understanding and fostering inclusion lies in everyday feedback processes (Flores et al., 2019). Contemporary research has shifted from viewing feedback as a formal appraisal to recognizing it as a continuous and socially

embedded daily practice, often referred to as feedback environment (Beck & Dahling, 2026; Katz et al., 2021; Steelman et al., 2004). Because this environment unfolds through ongoing interpersonal interactions, it provides frequent opportunities for employees to feel recognized and valued by their supervisors. As a result, it serves as a powerful mechanism for improving inclusion in day-to-day organizational life. (Shore et al., 2018; Song et al., 2023.)

For a feedback environment to be inclusive, individuals need to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or negative consequences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Such a climate enables the human needs for both belongingness and uniqueness to be met simultaneously (Shore et al., 2011). Because supervisors operate at the front line of performance management systems, they are central to shaping this balance through their daily interactions with subordinates (London & Smither, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2007). With their communication choices, supervisors have the power to either strengthen the climate of inclusion or weaken it (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Shore & Chung, 2022).

However, in practice, integrating inclusion into daily feedback practices might present challenges. Supervisors may hesitate to give or seek feedback because of concerns about negative emotional reactions or the risk of damaging relationships (Corwin et al., 2019). Moreover, supervisors often rely on standardized feedback approaches that fail to accommodate individual differences among team members, which may undermine an inclusive climate (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). While complete individualization may be impractical, recognizing these differences enables supervisors to support inclusive feedback environments that better align with the diverse needs of their team members (Gabriel et al., 2014).

Although inclusion and feedback environments have been studied in isolation, integrating these two domains can bridge the gap between official inclusion policies and actual everyday practices (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Both favorable feedback environments and a strong climate of inclusion are associated with numerous positive outcomes, including enhanced job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, team innovation, and reduced turnover intentions (Chen et al., 2023; Randel et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2019). Employees

who trust their supervisors and feel a sense of belonging are more willing to take interpersonal risks, such as asking for feedback or revealing weaknesses (Ashford et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2023). To achieve these benefits, supervisors must apply the principles of inclusive leadership within the team's feedback environment (Randel et al., 2018; Steelman et al., 2004).

Recent literature has increasingly called for more detailed research on specific managerial behaviors that influence team inclusion (Randel, 2025; Roberson & Perry, 2022). Given that supervisors play a central role in cultivating inclusion within their teams, this study aims to explore inclusive feedback environment from their perspectives. To investigate these dynamics in a real-world setting, this thesis is commissioned by a division of a large global technology company.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this thesis is to understand the ways in which supervisors foster an inclusive feedback environment within their teams. To understand specific leadership behaviors, it is essential to explore how supervisors perceive the meaning of inclusive feedback environment, how they see their role in fostering it, as well as the practical opportunities and challenges associated with inclusive feedback.

This study integrates conceptualizations of inclusion and feedback environment to position feedback as the context in which official inclusion policies are translated into daily managerial practice (Dahling et al., 2017; Song et al., 2023). While existing literature emphasizes the necessity of specific managerial behaviors to support team inclusion, it often lacks concrete context (Randel, 2025; Roberson & Perry, 2022). By positioning feedback environment as the practical context, this study responds to the call for empirical research on how inclusive leaders balance employees' needs for belongingness and uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018). Given that supervisors are the key actors in both inclusion and feedback dynamics, this research places an emphasis on their role and perspectives (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Qian et al., 2018).

Standardized feedback practices often assume that all individuals experience and respond to feedback in the same way (Dahling et al., 2017; Gabelica & Popov, 2020). However, research shows that feeling valued for one's unique contributions is a key driver of team engagement (Leroy et al., 2022; Mor Barak et al., 2022). Therefore, inclusive behavior is considered in this study as an approach through which supervisors can adapt their feedback practices to individual differences, ensuring that employees feel both recognized and supported in ways that resonate with their unique perspectives (Randel et al., 2018). To address the gap between these theoretical expectations and everyday practice, this study also examines how supervisors create inclusive feedback environments in their daily interactions by recognizing and responding to individual differences. Consequently, the study is guided by the following main research question:

> *How do supervisors contribute to the formation of an inclusive feedback environment within teams?*

To provide a comprehensive answer to the main question, this study examines two sub-questions:

> *In what ways do supervisors implement the principles of inclusion in their everyday leadership practices?*
>
> *How do supervisors adapt their feedback approaches to accommodate individual differences and diverse backgrounds?*

By analyzing empirical data against existing theoretical frameworks, this research focuses on the supervisors, who play a critical role in shaping the feedback environment and fostering inclusion. The objective is to identify empirical observations regarding how supervisors perceive and foster an inclusive feedback environment, and how they navigate individual differences in their daily leadership. These empirical findings are compared with the established literature to generate new theoretical and practical insights.

1.3 Key Concepts and the Scope of Research

This study examines the role of supervisors in fostering an inclusive feedback environment within their teams. To clarify the focus and specify the scope of the research, the key concepts are defined next. Establishing these definitions supports the theoretical framework and guides the analysis of the empirical data in alignment with the research questions.

Inclusion refers to the extent to which individuals feel valued and supported, while simultaneously experiencing a sense of belonging and being able to express their authentic selves within a group or organization (Shore et al., 2011). While diversity often refers to demographic representation, inclusion offers a more comprehensive perspective. It is an active process that transforms diversity from a thing to be managed into an asset contributing to organizational success. (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022.) The focus in this study is on *team inclusion* which refers to a climate in which individuals feel appreciated and are provided with structural and social opportunities to engage in the team's activities. (Ashikali et al., 2021.)

Inclusive leadership is conceptualized as a set of leader behaviors aimed at supporting both a sense of belonging and a recognition of uniqueness among team members. This means that leaders create an environment where individuals feel accepted and valued as part of the group, while also being encouraged to express their unique perspectives and identities. (Randel et al., 2018.) In this study, the term *supervisor* is used to denote these leaders, reflecting a focus on direct team supervisors. This choice was made because although senior management is accountable for establishing organizational policies that signal commitment to inclusion, it is the frontline team supervisors who are tasked with putting these commitments into practice and bringing them to life in everyday work (Mor Barak et al., 2022).

Feedback refers to advice provided by others at work on an employee's behaviors and job performance. Feedback can be provided, for example, by giving compliments, increasing responsibilities, and assigning challenging tasks. (Eva et al., 2019.) It is intended to enhance awareness of employees' performance, and it has been shown to

positively affect learning, motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance (Church et al., 2019; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

Feedback environment means continuous and daily feedback processes occurring between supervisors and subordinates, as well as among coworkers (Gabriel et al., 2014). However, the focus of this study is on the supervisor-subordinate dynamics. Distinct from formal and structured performance appraisal sessions, feedback environment encompasses the informal and everyday social exchanges where feedback occurs. In a positive feedback environment, feedback is viewed as a valuable resource for development. (Katz et al., 2021.)

Based on these concepts, the research focuses on supervisors' perspectives on their daily interactions with subordinates. Specifically, the research examines how frontline supervisors utilize the everyday feedback environment to foster inclusion within their own teams.

1.4 Structure of the Study

This thesis is organized into five main chapters. The introduction chapter discusses the background of the research topic and presents the research questions and the purpose of the study. Moreover, it defines the key concepts used in the research, which form the foundation of the theoretical framework. The second chapter examines the theoretical framework in more detail, presenting relevant research and literature on the topic. In this chapter, the core themes are explored separately before being synthesized into a framework that connects workplace inclusion with feedback environment.

The third chapter presents the methodology employed in this study, detailing the research context, the qualitative research design, the data collection process through semi-structured interviews with supervisors, and the data analysis methods. The fourth chapter presents the results of the interviews and provides a summary of the key findings. The fifth and final chapter concludes the study by comparing the results with prior theory. It also offers practical implications and recommendations for supervisors and organizations

to foster inclusive feedback environment. Furthermore, the chapter evaluates the study's trustworthiness, limitations and suggests potential avenues for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Inclusion

2.1.1 From Diversity Towards Inclusion

Although diversity and inclusion are often treated as similar concepts and combined under the acronym D&I in organizational practice, they remain distinct constructs (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022; Mor Barak et al., 2022). However, given their close connection and the scholarly consensus that inclusion should be regarded as a central outcome of diversity initiatives, a comprehensive understanding of both is essential for this study (Buengeler et al., 2018). As Shore et al. (2018) point out, a key distinction between the two is that while organizations can be legally mandated to implement diversity, inclusion relies on voluntary and intentional actions by the organization.

Diversity is conceptualized as the differences among individuals in the workforce, encompassing variations in demographic, personal, social, and experiential characteristics. It is crucial to consider intersectionality, which means that an individual's experience in the workplace is not determined solely by a single demographic characteristic but through numerous intersecting identities and backgrounds. (Ayoko & Fujimoto, 2023.) While team diversity has the potential to enhance overall performance by providing a broader range of knowledge and perspectives, research has questioned the assumption that diversity automatically leads to positive outcomes (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Roberson, 2019). Therefore, increasing the representation of diverse employees alone is insufficient, as team members may hesitate to share their knowledge or accept others' perspectives if they do not perceive themselves as integral members of the team (Leroy et al., 2022; Shore et al., 2018).

According to Ferdman (2017), inclusion requires seeing diversity as a positive asset rather than something to be managed or controlled. Therefore, to realize the full benefits of diversity, organizations need to focus on including diverse individuals (Shore et al., 2018). Inclusion represents a more comprehensive perspective, positioning diversity not

simply as a demographic feature to be managed, but as a strategic asset that contributes to organizational success (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Practices that promote inclusion aim to ensure that a diverse workforce becomes an integral part of the organization and its teams (Mor Barak et al., 2022). When effectively implemented, an inclusive workplace prizes diverse perspectives, enabling employees to engage and bring their authentic selves to all levels of the organization (Roberson, 2019).

While definitions of inclusion vary, they are rooted in the universal human need to feel accepted and valued within a community. In other words, individuals desire to feel both similar to and different from others. (Brewer, 1991.) Inclusion is often described as creating conditions in which individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, can be authentic at work, experience a sense of belonging, and feel appreciated for their unique contributions. The experience of inclusion frequently depends on the fit between an individual and other group members. (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Nishii & Leroy, 2022.) According to Ferdman (2017), inclusion is not merely a static state but an active practice in which diversity is understood as a resource.

Inclusion can be approached from multiple theoretical perspectives. On one hand, it is viewed primarily as an individual, psychological experience. From this perspective, inclusion is a continuum ranging from exclusion to full inclusion, in which an individual's sense of belonging and involvement reflects their perceived level of inclusion (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Similarly, Ferdman & Deane (2014) emphasize that inclusion depends on whether individuals feel included, highlighting the critical role of personal perceptions. On the other hand, inclusion has also been conceptualized as a set of organizational actions. For instance, Roberson (2006) defines it as the active removal of barriers that hinder employees' full participation and contribution. These differing perspectives highlight the complexity of inclusion. While inclusion has gained increasing attention in both research and practice, there remains a need to strengthen its theoretical foundations (Chung et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Inclusion in Teams

Existing literature conceptualizes inclusion at multiple levels, including organizational, team, and individual (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). However, this study focuses on inclusion at team level, as teams are the most significant work environments for individuals. Inclusion within one's immediate team has a stronger impact on an individual's sense of inclusion than organization-wide efforts. (Ashikali et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2020.) Inclusion at the team level is conceptualized as a climate in which diverse individuals feel genuinely appreciated and are provided with the structural and social opportunities to engage in the team's activities. (Ashikali et al., 2021.)

Shore et al. (2011) provide a widely cited definition of inclusion in teams, stating that it is "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (p. 1265). Belongingness refers to an individual's experience of being accepted and treated as an insider, fostering a genuine sense of belonging to the group. Uniqueness, on the other hand, involves the appreciation of all individuals, ensuring their full participation and the recognition of their distinct and individual characteristics. (Shore et al., 2011.) It refers to the individual traits, identities, and perspectives that distinguish employees from others. When organizations recognize and support these differences, they signal that employees are valued for who they are. (Randel et al., 2018.) Achieving inclusion requires balancing the tension between an individual's need for uniqueness and their desire to belong. Moreover, inclusion does not happen in isolation because the exclusion of any group member negatively affects the overall sense of inclusion for everyone else within that context. (Buengeler et al., 2018.)

Within the literature, Shore et al.'s (2011) 2x2 inclusion framework has become a primary lens for understanding inclusion, especially in workgroups. Their framework consists of four distinct states: inclusion, exclusion, assimilation, and differentiation (Figure 1).

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	**Exclusion** Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.	**Assimilation** Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.
High Value in Uniqueness	**Differentiation** Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group, but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/organization success.	**Inclusion** Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness withing the work group.

Figure 1: 2x2 inclusion framework (Shore et al., 2011)

True inclusion within a team arises when individuals experience a strong sense of belonging and in this state, employees perceive themselves as full members of the team without having to suppress authentic aspects of their identity. When a team values its members' unique characteristics, it fosters a sense of inclusion, which can enhance overall team performance. Conversely, if an individual experiences high belongingness but low uniqueness, they become assimilated into the team. This means they are accepted only if they adopt the team's dominant operational and cognitive patterns, without emphasizing their individual differences. A feeling of differentiation occurs when an individual's uniqueness is valued, but their sense of belonging is low. Experiencing neither a sense of belonging nor uniqueness results in exclusion. (Shore et al., 2011.) Research by Chung et al. (2020) further deepens the understanding of workgroup inclusion by providing a validated measurement tool and confirming that inclusion is not a static state but a continuous interpersonal process. Their study confirms that a sense of belonging without appreciation of uniqueness leads to assimilation. In contrast, the simultaneous fulfilment of both enables genuine inclusion and the leveraging of diversity as a strategic resource.

To foster a sense of inclusion, teams must build a climate where diverse individuals are treated as insiders and see that their differences are supported for collective learning (Ashikali et al., 2021). A high climate of inclusion indicates that relational biases are minimized, so an individual's identity or group membership does not affect their access to resources or power, nor does it determine their ability to achieve goals (Mor Barak et

al., 2022). According to Shore et al. (2011), an inclusive climate comprises two components: fairness systems that ensure equitable treatment and a diversity climate that emphasizes the appreciation of employees. While Shore et al. (2011) provide a theoretical foundation for inclusive climate, Nishii (2013) operationalizes it into concrete team-level practices through three dimensions, helping supervisors translate inclusion into daily teamwork (Mor Barak et al., 2022).

The first dimension, fairly implemented employment practices, mirrors Shore et al.'s (2011) fairness systems by ensuring unbiased processes and equal opportunities for all. The second dimension, the integration of differences, promotes openness and the appreciation of diverse perspectives. This allows team members to express their authentic social identities without fear, fulfilling their need for uniqueness (Ashikali et al., 2021; Nishii, 2013). The third dimension, inclusion in decision-making, fosters a sense of belonging. By soliciting and utilizing diverse ideas to improve work practices, this dimension ensures that all team members feel like valued insiders (Randel et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011).

In an inclusive environment, individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or negative consequences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Team members who feel their individuality is recognized and encouraged within a group are more likely to share and apply new perspectives and creative ideas. Research indicates that when individuals perceive themselves as valued for their unique contributions, they are more motivated to engage in team activities. (Leroy et al., 2022; Mor Barak et al., 2022.) Feeling a sense of belonging in a team complements the benefits of experiencing uniqueness. When individuals feel connected to the group, they are more likely to share information and engage in collective learning, thereby enhancing creative outcomes. Belongingness also strengthens members' identification with the team and their willingness to contribute, while reducing uncertainty when expressing unconventional perspectives. (Carmeli et al., 2010; Leroy et al., 2022.)

As diversity increases, leaders who behave inclusively and foster inclusion among their team members play an even more important role in organizational success (Shore & Chung, 2022). Consequently, research on workplace inclusion, inclusive climates, and

inclusive leadership has grown a lot in recent years. The focus is no longer merely on the distinctions between diversity and inclusion, or even on whether inclusion is necessary to engage and leverage a diverse workforce. Instead, the next wave of research is focusing on how to facilitate employees' experiences of inclusion and develop an inclusive climate. (Nishii & Leroy, 2022.) However, a detailed understanding of the specific leader's behaviors that foster an inclusive environment remains limited (Roberson & Perry, 2022). Therefore, this study concentrates on supervisors' behaviors, which are recognized as the primary means of operationalizing inclusion at the team level. These supervisory actions are the mechanism through which diversity policies translate into realized organizational value. (Randel et al., 2018; Nishii & Leroy, 2022.)

2.1.3 Inclusive Leadership

Different actions to foster inclusion can be taken at every organizational level, and each member contributes to shaping the overall climate (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). However, many researchers emphasize the role of leadership, as leaders are essential to creating inclusive environments given their direct influence on employees' experiences (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). Although senior management is accountable for establishing policies that signal a commitment to inclusion, it is the team supervisors who are tasked with putting these commitments into practice and bringing them to life in everyday work (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Subordinates observe their supervisors' words and actions to understand what the organization values and what is expected of them. Through their behavior, supervisors serve as role models, encouraging team members to adopt more inclusive practices. (Mor Barak et al., 2022.) By virtue of their formal roles, supervisors can either strengthen existing organizational inequalities or work to challenge them (Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

Within this context, the concept of inclusive leadership has gained increasing attention. Inclusive leadership is understood as a set of positive leadership behaviors that facilitate a sense of belonging and uniqueness among individuals by providing them with opportunities and freedom to express diverse viewpoints (Brewer, 1991; Shore et al., 2011). Emerging at the intersection of diversity management and leadership studies, it focuses on how leaders can optimize diverse workgroups by fostering environments

where all members can thrive (Ashikali et al., 2021; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Early empirical work by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) defined leader inclusiveness as words and actions that signal an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions. This means that inclusive leaders practice active listening and encourage employees to communicate their opinions and find different ways to achieve outcomes (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Later, Carmeli et al. (2010) broadened the concept as “leaders who exhibit openness, accessibility, and availability in their interaction with followers” (p. 250). More recent definitions emphasize its dynamic and contextual nature. For example, Nishii and Leroy (2022) conceptualize it as an evolving process that operates across multiple levels and adapts to specific diversity contexts, rather than being limited to a fixed set of traits.

While scholars agree that research on inclusive leadership is still developing, they often question how inclusive leadership differs from other contemporary leadership styles (Shore et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership shares foundational features with ethical, servant, and transformational leadership, such as demonstrating supportive behaviors, maintaining openness, and seeking employee feedback (Carmeli et al., 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2022). However, in contrast to these styles, inclusive leadership places more specific emphasis on valuing diversity in all its forms while simultaneously fostering a genuine sense of inclusion among all team members (Carmeli et al., 2010; Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

The theoretical foundation of inclusive leadership is rooted in optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), which posits that individuals simultaneously need to feel a sense of belonging to a work group while maintaining their uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Building on this premise and earlier conceptualizations of workplace inclusion, Randel et al. (2018) define inclusive leadership in teams as a set of leader behaviors that successfully balance these dual needs. They argue that focusing on only one dimension of inclusion can lead to unintended consequences. Emphasizing belongingness alone may increase pressure to conform, whereas prioritizing uniqueness in isolation can shift attention away from shared team goals. However, depending on the situation, an individual may require more of one need than the other. (Shore et al., 2011.) To

operationalize these ideas, Randel et al. (2018) developed a framework consisting of five behavioral categories (Figure 2).

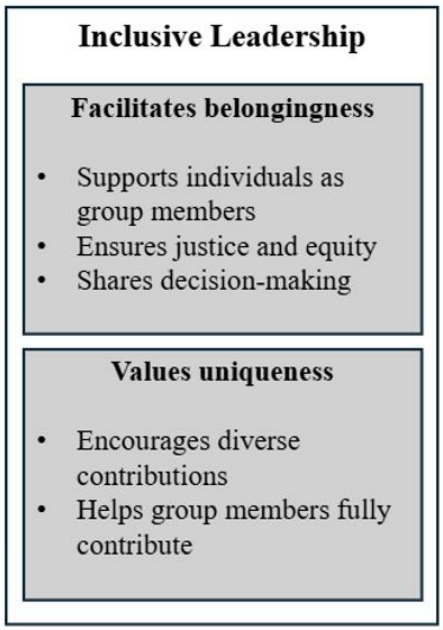

Figure 2: Inclusive leadership categories (Randel et al., 2018)

The first three categories of Randel et al.'s (2018) framework focus on facilitating a sense of belonging. First, supporting individuals as group members entails supervisors making team members feel comfortable and communicating that they have the members' best interests in mind. Supervisors who show genuine interest create a psychologically safe environment where individuals feel they matter (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Second, supervisors must ensure justice and equity to prevent marginalization. This involves mitigating unconscious bias, distributing resources fairly, and adjusting team norms to signal that the organization values its members' diverse identities (Randel et al., 2018; Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). The final dimension of belongingness is shared decision-making, through which the leader redistributes power by broadly consulting members on work processes. Supervisors demonstrate this by maintaining transparency and acting collaboratively with the team rather than directing them. (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Randel et al., 2018.)

Complementing these are two categories focused on valuing uniqueness, which prevents the pressures of assimilation. Inclusive leaders prioritize encouraging diverse

contributions by soliciting non-traditional viewpoints, even when such perspectives challenge established group norms. Supervisors must invite disagreement and ensure that outspoken members do not dominate the conversation. (Randel et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022.) Leaders must focus on helping members contribute by identifying and removing systemic or social barriers that may hinder participation (Randel et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011). Synthesizing these elements, Leroy et al. (2022) demonstrate that leaders foster inclusion by communicating the value of differences, which build strong value-in-diversity beliefs across the team.

While Randel et al.'s (2018) model provides a structured foundation, contemporary research emphasizes that inclusive leadership extends beyond these specific categories. For instance, Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022) highlight that showing appreciation for individual achievements and maintaining flexibility regarding inclusion-related strategies are also critical dimensions of inclusive leadership. A complementary perspective by Nishii and Leroy (2022) conceptualizes inclusive leadership not just as individual actions, but as a supervisor's capacity to create shared motivations, norms, and accountability structures. This perspective underscores the role of supervisors in clarifying expectations and reducing uncertainty around inclusive behaviors in daily work.

When effectively enacted, inclusive leadership is associated with numerous positive outcomes. It has been shown to foster positive attitudes, enhance job performance, and support effective collaboration among team members from different backgrounds, thereby strengthening team cohesion. (Ashikali et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2019.) Beyond performance, inclusive leadership positively influences psychological well-being by enhancing empowerment, strengthening psychological resources, and promoting psychological safety (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Randel et al., 2018). Promoting the importance of differences reduces intergroup bias and lowers employee turnover, while high-quality leader-team relationships encourage the active exchange of innovative ideas through team voice (Nishii, 2013; Randel et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2019).

However, not all scholars view inclusion and inclusive leadership as beneficial (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Some question the assumption that inclusion always leads to positive outcomes. For example, Adamson et al. (2021) and Ayoko and Fujimoto (2023) argue

that poorly implemented inclusion initiatives may obscure underlying inequalities or pressure minority members to conform to dominant norms. This highlights the risk of a disconnect between formal inclusion policies and their practical implementation, often referred to as decoupling, which can create the perception that organizations do not put their inclusion values into practice (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Moreover, continuously balancing needs of belonging and uniqueness can be demanding for supervisors, and it requires sustained effort (Roberson & Perry, 2022). Without a clear understanding of what fosters belongingness and uniqueness, supervisors may believe they are promoting inclusion while failing to achieve its intended outcomes (Canlas & Williams, 2022).

In multinational contexts, additional challenges arise. When organizations apply inclusion practices developed in one cultural setting to others, differences in diversity management maturity and readiness for inclusion may reduce their effectiveness (Shore et al., 2018). Understandings of inclusion vary across cultures, and a lack of cultural sensitivity can undermine leadership efforts (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). These considerations highlight the importance of adapting inclusive leadership practices to the specific cultural and organizational context (Shore et al., 2018; van Knippenberg & van Ginkel, 2022). The rise of remote work has also introduced complexities for inclusive leadership, especially regarding the need for belongingness. Traditional inclusive leadership models often overlook the unique dynamics of virtual environments (Byrd, 2022). Consequently, organizations that expect their office-based culture to organically translate to remote settings risk isolating their employees. Because working independently in virtual environments can be detrimental to a sense of belonging, supervisors must adapt to this by developing new approaches to daily leadership. (Yarberry & Sims, 2021.)

2.2 Feedback Environment

2.2.1 Conceptualizing Feedback Environment

While feedback has been examined across many different fields, the present study focuses specifically on the organizational context. In organizations, feedback is typically viewed as information provided to a recipient that evaluates their performance or behavior.

(Ashford et al., 2016.) Some scholars conceptualize feedback broadly as any type of information (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), while others emphasize it as performance-related information provided to employees in organizational contexts (Ilgen et al., 1979). Feedback is intended to enhance individuals' awareness of their performance, and it has been shown to positively affect learning, motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance (Church et al., 2019; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In teams, feedback is often used as a strategic tool by supervisors to shape employees' behaviors and attitudes, while also fostering more effective communication between employees and supervisors (Cook & Steyn, 2024).

Feedback is often the most direct way for supervisors to influence their subordinates' performance, and providing it is not simply a skill but a deliberate choice that requires time and commitment. Supervisors use feedback to reduce the gap between an employee's current performance and the desired performance level. (Beck & Dahling, 2026.) However, sometimes recipients respond defensively and dismiss feedback. As a result, feedback providers may delay or avoid giving it, highlighting that both the content and the social context in which it is delivered play a critical role in shaping its effectiveness. (Anseel & Sherf, 2025; Steelman et al., 2004.)

Therefore, research suggests that organizations should aim to create a strong feedback environment, or feedback culture, because context determines whether feedback remains isolated or is converted into action (Baker et al., 2013). A strong feedback environment is also essential to ensure that feedback enhances performance, as research suggests that feedback alone does not always improve performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Schleicher et al., 2018). While concepts of feedback environment and culture overlap, feedback environment focuses on immediate everyday processes, whereas feedback culture represents the broader organizational support system that encourages members to continuously apply feedback (London & Smither, 2002; Steelman et al., 2004). This thesis focuses on the feedback environment to examine supervisors' daily leadership behaviors.

Feedback research and practice have evolved considerably in recent decades. Traditional approaches that rely on numerical metrics and periodic reporting often fail to motivate

employees, resulting in frustration. Consequently, many organizations are restructuring their performance management systems to generate genuine value, shifting their focus from static evaluations to collaborative cultures that emphasize continuous, timely feedback. (Adler et al., 2016.) Instead of treating feedback as a one-time event, they now view it as a continuous and ongoing process that supports learning and improvement over time (Church et al., 2019; Cook & Steyn, 2024; Katz et al., 2021). To support this transition, researchers are now exploring models that embed feedback as an ongoing organizational practice, and one such foundational concept is feedback environment, which can be defined as "the contextual aspects of day-to-day supervisor-subordinate and coworker-coworker feedback processes rather than the formal performance appraisal feedback session" (Steelman et al., 2004, p. 166).

To operationalize this concept, Steelman et al. (2004) developed the Feedback Environment Scale (FES) to assess employees' perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of daily feedback processes. The model conceptualizes feedback environment as a multidimensional construct consisting of seven facets. These facets represent the contextual elements of everyday interactions and together form a comprehensive feedback environment (Gabriel et al., 2014; Whitaker et al., 2007). Although the FES was designed to capture both supervisor–subordinate and coworker–coworker relationships, most empirical studies have focused on the supervisor–subordinate relationship (Katz et al., 2021). This study also focuses more on the supervisor-subordinate relationship because supervisors operate at the front line of performance management and serve as the primary organizational representatives who establish the daily norms of interaction (Lee et al., 2021; Whitaker et al., 2007). The facets of feedback environment are presented below (Figure 3).

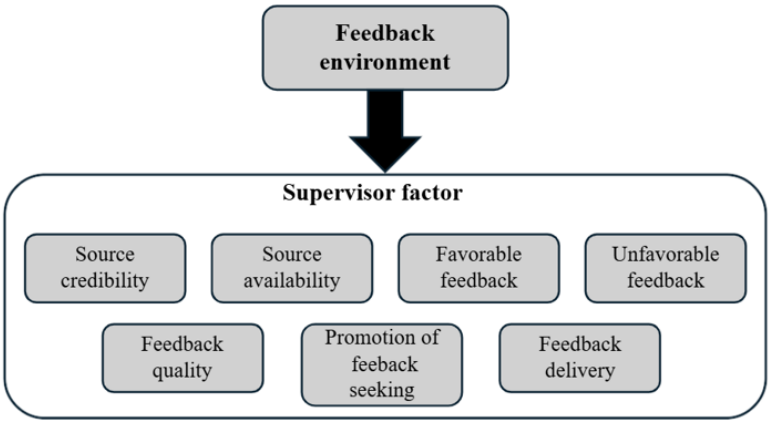

Figure 3: Feedback environment framework (Steelman et al., 2004)

Source credibility refers to an employee's perception of the competence and trustworthiness of the feedback source. Employees are more likely to accept, seek out, and act on feedback when they perceive their supervisor as a credible source. (Ilgen et al., 1979; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker & Levy, 2012.)

Source availability refers to the supervisor's accessibility, indicating how easily an employee can reach the supervisor for feedback (Elicker et al., 2019). Availability is essential to ensure feedback is exchanged during daily work interactions, rather than being limited to formal performance reviews (Steelman et al., 2004).

Feedback delivery is defined by the provider's ability to present information thoughtfully, taking the receiver's potential emotional response into account (Gallo & Steelman, 2019). In addition to the message's content, providers must pay attention to their manner of delivery. For example, Young et al. (2017) demonstrate that employees have more positive reactions to negative feedback when supervisors provide it with empathic concern.

Feedback quality characterizes the value and practical utility of the feedback message (Elicker et al., 2019). High-quality feedback is consistent, specific, and genuinely useful for the recipient (Katz et al., 2021). By deciding what to communicate, supervisors help subordinates both receive and understand the information necessary to address performance gaps (Beck & Dahling, 2026). High-quality feedback is intended to enhance individuals' awareness of their performance. When feedback quality is high, it supports

development by positively affecting employees' learning, motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. (Church et al., 2019.)

Favorable and unfavorable feedback differ from the traditional distinction between positive and negative feedback. According to Steelman et al. (2004), the key factor is the recipient's perception of the feedback's accuracy. Favorable feedback is positive feedback that the recipient perceives as deserved, while unfavorable feedback is corrective feedback that the recipient also perceives as deserved. Employees appreciate both types of feedback when delivered constructively (Gallo & Steelman, 2019).

Promotion of feedback seeking is the extent to which the prevailing climate encourages employees to seek feedback. It encompasses how much employees are encouraged to seek feedback and how comfortable they perceive themselves to be requesting it. (Steelman et al., 2004.) To promote feedback-seeking, supervisors must cultivate a psychologically safe environment that reduces the perceived social costs of asking for guidance or admitting mistakes (Anseel et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2023).

When organizations score high on these facets, they are said to have a strong feedback environment (Mertens & Schollaert, 2024). Favorable feedback environments are positively associated with numerous benefits, including employee performance, job satisfaction, embeddedness, role clarity, and reduced turnover intentions (Chen et al., 2023; Gallo et al., 2022; Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008). According to Whitaker et al. (2007), the more effectively these seven dimensions are integrated, the stronger the team's overall feedback environment becomes.

However, challenges may arise from the assumption that all employees experience this environment in the same way (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). Dahling et al. (2017) argue that standardized approaches often incorrectly assume uniform experiences and overlook individual profiles. For example, while some employees may appreciate and benefit from direct, unfiltered corrective feedback, others may require supportive positive reinforcement to prevent defensive reactions and ensure the core message is received (Beck & Dahling, 2026). This underlines the need to understand individual differences in feedback processes, which will be examined in the following section.

2.2.2 Role of Individual Differences in Feedback Processing

When organizations attempt to implement standardized practices, they rarely achieve the desired outcomes. In the context of feedback, employees do not perceive or react to identical practices in the same way. This highlights that "one-size-fits-all" solutions can trigger negative reactions or even decrease motivation. (Corwin et al., 2019; Gabelica & Popov, 2020.) Therefore, even within a favorable feedback environment, how employees receive, interpret, and utilize feedback varies due to a range of factors, including personality traits, demographic characteristics, values, and other individual differences (Ashford et al., 2016; Condrea & Iliescu, 2025).

Navigating the intersection of individual traits can be challenging for supervisors. For example, as workplaces become more diverse, employees from different cultural backgrounds, genders, and generations often have different expectations about how feedback should be delivered and by whom. Without understanding these differences, even well-intentioned feedback can be misunderstood. (Meyer, 2023.) Supervisors must understand this, as there is no single correct method for delivering feedback that works universally, and recipients play an active role in feedback processes (Corwin et al., 2019; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). If an individual rejects the feedback they receive, their behavior will remain unchanged, defeating the primary purpose of the feedback intervention (Gabelica & Popov, 2020).

A central factor influencing how individuals respond to feedback is their feedback orientation, which represents an individual's overall receptivity to feedback and the extent to which they welcome guidance (London & Smither, 2002). Individuals with a high feedback orientation believe that feedback adds value, process it deeply, and feel accountable for acting on it. Consequently, they tend to use feedback to support personal growth and career advancement. (Patel et al., 2019.)

On the other hand, individuals with low feedback orientation are less receptive. They may overlook, ignore, or reject feedback, making them unlikely to benefit even in supportive environments. Research suggests that an individual's feedback orientation determines the

effectiveness of feedback, highlighting that the same feedback practices are not experienced equally by all employees. (Katz et al., 2023; London & Smither, 2002.) If previous attempts to deliver feedback have been ignored by an employee with a low feedback orientation, the supervisor's expectation that future feedback will lead to behavioral change may decline. Supervisors may consciously or subconsciously withdraw their effort and stop providing feedback to these individuals, viewing it as a poor investment of their limited capacity. (Beck & Dahling, 2026.)

Beyond an employee's feedback orientation, personality traits, and personal goals shape how an employee navigates feedback environment (Patel et al., 2019). Employees focused on developing their skills tend to embrace feedback more readily. In contrast, those primarily concerned with proving their competence or avoiding the appearance of incompetence are typically much less receptive. Individuals with high emotional stability are more resilient to ego threats posed by critical feedback, enabling them to process negative evaluations without experiencing emotional distress. (Chawla et al., 2016.)

Research also indicates that demographic variables, such as age, experience, gender, race, and tenure, influence feedback processes. For instance, older and more tenured employees seek feedback less frequently than their younger counterparts. Because experienced professionals have greater role certainty and are familiar with their daily routines, they experience lower levels of uncertainty. They may place less intrinsic value on continuous evaluation. (Anseel et al., 2015.) Condrea and Iliescu (2025) highlight that early-career employees are more receptive to evaluative information and show greater improvement in response to it, as they are learning and adapting to their new roles. On the other hand, as employees age and gain experience, their emotional and behavioral responses to feedback tend to stabilize.

Feedback processes also vary across cultures because they rely on assumptions and values that are not universally shared. Therefore, feedback and interaction styles are also closely tied to cultural context. (Gabelica & Popov, 2020.) For instance, employees with high individual-level power distance are more sensitive to power differentials and weigh the social costs of interacting with authority figures. For these individuals, a favorable feedback environment is critical, as they are otherwise more reluctant to ask their

supervisors for advice out of respect. (Elicker et al., 2019.) Cultural differences dictate how feedback itself is interpreted. While some individuals view direct critique as an invaluable tool for learning, others perceive such straightforwardness as inappropriate and prefer to avoid communication styles that might provoke conflict. (Gabelica & Popov, 2020.) Teams with many nationalities often face language barriers absent in mononational teams and are more vulnerable to miscommunication (Lu et al., 2022).

In addition to shaping how employees receive feedback, these individual differences also influence whether an employee will engage in feedback-seeking behavior. Active feedback-seeking is integral to a strong feedback environment, particularly in contemporary knowledge-intensive and remote work settings where everyday feedback is often less accessible. (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2016.) The decision to seek feedback is influenced by a cost-benefit analysis, meaning individuals are more likely to seek feedback when the perceived benefits outweigh the costs (Anseel et al., 2015). When the perceived costs of feedback-seeking, such as the loss of face, threats to self-concept, or high effort requirements, exceed its perceived value, individuals are less likely to seek it (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Mertens & Schollaert, 2024).

2.2.3 Supervisors' Influence on Feedback Environment

While feedback environment also includes coworker-to-coworker interactions, research emphasizes the central role of supervisors in shaping it (Tseng & Levy, 2019). As supervisors operate on the frontline of performance management systems, they are the main actors of feedback environment through their everyday interactions with employees (London & Smither, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2007). In the absence of structured annual reviews, the effectiveness of feedback environment depends a lot on supervisors' ongoing motivation and choices to engage in performance-related exchanges (Beck & Dahling, 2026).

A central factor shaping how supervisors approach feedback is their mindset. If supervisors believe people can develop and improve, they tend to give higher-quality feedback and are more receptive to others' feedback (Drawbaugh et al., 2019). On the contrary, if they lack belief, subordinates may not feel comfortable giving or seeking

feedback either (Mertens & Schollaert, 2024). Therefore, supervisors' mindsets and actions are essential in fostering a favorable environment, as they reduce the perceived social costs of seeking guidance or admitting mistakes (Anseel et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2023).

Supervisors' everyday behavior influence the feedback environment of the whole team. Coutifaris and Grant (2022) show that supervisors who act as role models by sharing their own past performance feedback and mistakes build stronger and more lasting psychological safety than those who encourage employees to ask for feedback. By acknowledging their own imperfections, supervisors help normalize mistakes and reduce the fear or discomfort associated with seeking help or guidance. (Anseel et al., 2015.) This sense of psychological safety is linked to the quality of leader–member exchange (LMX). Employees in high-quality LMX relationships, which are based on trust and support, are more willing to share their weaknesses and accept critical feedback from their supervisor (Liao et al., 2023; Peng & Lin, 2016). Supervisors build trust by treating employees fairly and using transparent decision-making processes (Beck & Dahling, 2026).

However, feedback is only effective when it is properly received and acted upon (Condrea & Iliescu, 2025). As Ilgen et al. (1979) argue, recipients must go through several cognitive stages for feedback to lead to behavioral change, including correctly understanding the message, accepting it as valid, and intending to respond to it. Building on this, Beck and Dahling (2026) note that supervisors must support both accuracy and receptivity in the feedback process. Accuracy refers to ensuring that feedback is clearly understood and reflects a shared view of performance, while receptivity involves the recipient's acceptance of the feedback as truthful and their willingness to adjust behavior accordingly. Achieving these outcomes requires supervisors to allocate effort across different types of feedback behaviors.

First, source-directed behaviors help build the credibility needed for both feedback accuracy and receptivity (Beck & Dahling, 2026). In addition to maintaining interpersonal trust, supervisors need to show expertise by understanding employees' work and connecting individual tasks to broader organizational goals. In doing so, they

establish themselves as legitimate and trustworthy sources of feedback. (Liao et al., 2023; Peng & Lin, 2016; Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004; Steelman & Williams, 2019.) Second, content-directed behaviors focus on ensuring feedback accuracy (Beck & Dahling, 2026). This requires supervisors to put effort into giving clear and specific messages that are based on observable work behavior (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The goal is to provide employees with precise information that helps them understand and address performance gaps (Ilgen et al., 1979).

To ensure that accurate feedback is not rejected or ignored, supervisors must use delivery-directed behaviors, which support feedback receptivity (Beck & Dahling, 2026). Poor delivery can easily lead to defensiveness and discomfort, so supervisors need to consider tone, timing, and communication channel (Anseel & Sherf, 2025). While respectful and empathetic delivery improves acceptance, a one-size-fits-all approach is often ineffective. Instead, supervisors should adjust how they deliver feedback based on individual differences, thinking styles, and employees' readiness to receive criticism. Creating a strong feedback environment is not always easy for supervisors, and they often hesitate to give or ask for feedback because they worry about discomfort, negative emotional reactions, or damaging working relationships (Corwin et al., 2019). Despite operating under uniform policies and expectations from upper management, the effectiveness and acceptance of the shared practices vary within the same organization. The variance arises because the actual implementation depends on individual supervisors, who are responsible for bringing performance management to life through daily interactions with their employees. (Drawbaugh et al., 2019.)

One key barrier to creating a continuous feedback environment is supervisors' lack of time, as providing feedback requires time and effort that must be allocated alongside other leadership responsibilities (Condrea & Iliescu, 2025). When managerial workloads are high, supervisors are likely to divert their time and energy from providing feedback to address other pressing matters (Beck & Dahling, 2026). If a supervisor is busy and employees must book feedback meetings well in advance, the effort required may outweigh the perceived benefit, discouraging timely feedback-seeking (Whitaker et al., 2007). This might make it harder to create a feedback environment, since it should be embedded in everyday work practices and ongoing social exchanges (Katz et al., 2021).

Another challenge in delivering corrective feedback stems from the supervisors' own interpersonal concerns. Supervisors strive to maintain positive relationships with their subordinates and often fear that negative feedback might jeopardize these bonds or create awkward situations (Beck & Dahling, 2026). Simon et al. (2022) demonstrate that empathetic leaders experience heightened anxiety and often fixate on the recipient's potential distress, which can hinder their effectiveness if it causes them to avoid delivering necessary critique. However, even when supervisors overcome their reluctance to give feedback, their efforts may be ineffective if the message is dismissed, as rejected feedback rarely leads to behavioral change (Beck & Dahling, 2026). This underscores the importance of fostering feedback receptivity, meaning employees must view the feedback as credible and be willing to act on it. To support this, supervisors need to deliver feedback in a constructive and considerate manner, as employees' acceptance of feedback depends largely on the provider's credibility, the quality of the message, and how it is communicated (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004).

Other challenges for supervisors include underestimating the benefits of feedback. If a supervisor views negative evaluations as a direct threat to their own professional image, it can undermine the broader feedback environment. (Ashford et al., 2016; Condrea & Iliescu, 2025.) Supervisors are not always aware of how their behavior affects employees or what kinds of reactions it may trigger (Drawbaugh et al., 2019). For example, if supervisors incorrectly assume that all employees value high-quality feedback, such efforts may prove counterproductive for individuals with low feedback orientation. (Gabelica & Popov, 2020.) Therefore, supervisors can develop their feedback practices by seeking input from employees, while organizations can support this by strengthening the overall feedback environment through training. One effective approach is to enhance supervisors' understanding of both the purpose and process of giving and receiving feedback. Providing feedback on feedback has been shown to be a valuable training method, as it helps managers improve the clarity and effectiveness of the performance evaluations they deliver to their team members. (Elicker et al., 2019.)

2.3 A Theoretical Synthesis: Inclusive Feedback Environment

The literature presented in this chapter forms a theoretical synthesis that serves as the framework for this study. The synthesis integrates two separately studied topics, positioning the team supervisor as a key actor in fostering an inclusive feedback environment within teams. Moreover, while existing literature emphasizes the necessity of specific managerial behaviors to foster team inclusion, it often lacks practical context (Randel, 2025; Roberson & Perry, 2022). To address this gap, the theoretical framework synthesizes these domains by illustrating supervisors' role as a facilitator of both inclusion and feedback environment leading to an inclusive feedback environment.

Figure 4 presents the theoretical framework for this study. The core theories guiding the framework are Shore et al.'s (2011) theory of optimal distinctiveness, which highlights the importance of balancing employees' needs to belong with their need to feel unique, and Steelman et al.'s (2004) seven facets of feedback environment. Supervisors influence both through their everyday actions and feedback practices. Figure 4 illustrates how these theories combine into a synthesis which is called inclusive feedback environment. This study defines it as a workplace context where supervisors use feedback to support employees' needs for both belongingness and uniqueness.

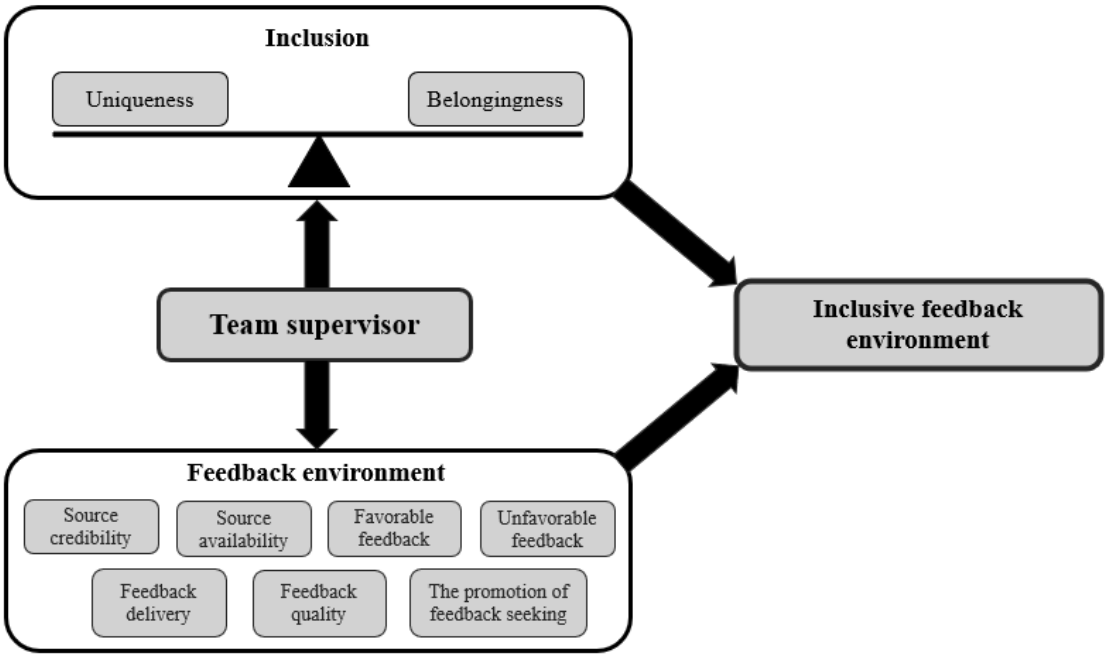

Figure 4: Theoretical framework (Shore et al., 2011; Steelman et al., 2004)

As illustrated in Figure 4, the theoretical framework identifies team supervisor as the connecting link between inclusion and feedback environment. However, supervisors do more than just act as a link between the two concepts. They have a major impact on fostering both of them, and the arrows in the figure illustrate this direct influence. The supervisor plays an active role in fostering inclusion within the team by translating inclusive goals into everyday actions.

In the framework, the balancing of employees' dual needs is illustrated as a scale in Figure 4. Supervisors balance the needs for belongingness and uniqueness by operationalizing inclusive behaviors through the seven facets of feedback environment. The facets include source credibility, source availability, feedback delivery, feedback quality, favorable and unfavorable feedback, and the promotion of feedback seeking (Shore et al., 2011; Steelman et al., 2004). The arrows demonstrate how supervisors can act as a link between inclusion and feedback environment, which together form an inclusive feedback environment.

Within this framework, actions that foster inclusion are inclusive leadership behaviors. According to Randel et al. (2018), to cultivate a sense of belonging, supervisors should

support individuals as integral members of the group, ensure justice and equity, and share decision-making. Simultaneously, to value uniqueness, supervisors must encourage diverse contributions and empower group members to contribute. Although Randel et al.'s (2018) categories provide a basis for recognizing inclusive leadership behaviors, this study aims to expand this view by identifying more concrete ways to foster inclusion through feedback practices.

The framework proposes that fostering an inclusive feedback environment requires supervisors to integrate inclusive behaviors across all seven facets (Steelman et al., 2004). While Steelman et al.'s (2004) framework provides a necessary foundation, standardized approaches to feedback processes are rarely effective across a diverse workforce (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). As employees differ in how they experience and interpret feedback, a uniform application of the facets may fail to account for individual differences (Dahling et al., 2017). Therefore, this study also examines how supervisors individualize their feedback practices to meet diverse employee needs. By tailoring their communication, supervisors ensure that feedback environment supports everyone's uniqueness without compromising their fundamental sense of belonging to the team (Gabelica & Popov, 2020; Shore et al., 2011).

This theoretical synthesis bridges the gap between inclusion and feedback environment, providing the lens through which the findings and theoretical contributions will be analyzed. Based on the main research question of *how do supervisors contribute to the formation of an inclusive feedback environment within teams*, this synthesis serves as the foundation for the empirical phase. The next chapter presents the methodology and explains how the framework guided the collection and analysis of supervisors' experiences.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Context

The research context for this study is a large global technology company. This thesis is commissioned by a specific division within the company. To ensure that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences openly, the commissioning company and the specific division remain anonymous in this study.

The organization identifies both feedback and inclusion as central pillars of its corporate culture, operating on the premise that mastering both is essential for a thriving workplace. Although the company fosters these themes through separate initiatives, their practical intersection has rarely been investigated internally. In particular, little attention has been given to how inclusion is reflected in everyday feedback interactions. This gap provides a valuable opportunity to explore how these corporate values are reflected in daily team dynamics.

The decision to focus on managerial perspectives was prompted by a series of feedback training sessions held for supervisors in the autumn of 2025. These sessions provided supervisors with a framework for understanding the critical nature of feedback, navigating employee reactions, and building a strong feedback environment while addressing challenges related to feedback. The supervisors have also participated in inclusion awareness training courses, which aimed to help supervisors to turn inclusion into everyday practice, recognize their own unconscious biases, and provide them with tools to build a culture where everyone feels they belong. These training courses make supervisors suitable for exploring whether they feel like training and policies are operationalized in everyday practice.

The participants in this study consist of supervisors who manage their own teams within the same division in Finland. To understand their leadership context, it is important to consider the complexity of the teams they manage. The supervisors participating in the research lead diverse groups of individuals encompassing a wide range of ages, genders,

educational backgrounds, levels of experience, and cultural backgrounds. Although the supervisors in this study are based in Finland, their work takes place in an international environment where English is often the main working language. Many teams work in hybrid settings, which reduces daily face-to-face interactions and adds another layer of complexity to their everyday feedback practices. While the research is conducted within this specific division, the objective is to provide transferable insights that can be applied beyond this single organizational unit.

3.2 Qualitative Research Design

This study was conducted as qualitative research. Central aim of qualitative research is to deepen the understanding of the investigated phenomenon within its natural setting, while simultaneously highlighting the subjective perspectives of the participants (Marshall et al., 2021). The primary aim of this study is to understand how supervisors view inclusive feedback environment within their teams and how they foster it through their daily practices, and therefore a qualitative research design is appropriate for this study. Qualitative research ensures that the experiences and perspectives of supervisors are captured in their full depth and complexity (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research designs are generally categorized into qualitative and quantitative approaches. While quantitative research relies on numerical data and statistical analysis to measure specific variables, qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data to understand complex social dynamics and individual experiences. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021.) Because this study does not aim to measure for example the statistical relationship between feedback frequency and levels of employee inclusion, which would require a quantitative research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), a qualitative approach is better choice for this thesis.

Since a climate of inclusion and a feedback environment are built on social interactions, a qualitative approach was chosen to prioritize the exploration of these relationships (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, qualitative research operates on the premise that there are multiple valid ways of understanding the world, rather than a single objective reality (Marshall et al., 2021). In the context of this study, this means

acknowledging that each supervisor's experience of navigating team diversity and delivering feedback is unique and context dependent. By utilizing this methodology, supervisors can share their authentic perspectives, emphasizing that their lived experiences as supervisors are valuable data in themselves (Marshall et al., 2021).

Moreover, qualitative research is effective for investigating underexplored topics (Saunders et al., 2019). It means that especially when exploring a new subject, a qualitative research design is well suited (Hirsjärvi et al., 2015). In this study, it means that, as prior literature has rarely examined feedback environment through the lens of inclusion. This also guided the methods chosen for data collection and analysis, which will be described in chapters below.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection method chosen for this study was semi-structured interviews. This method is based on a predetermined set of themes while allowing flexibility in the order and wording of questions as the conversation develops (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). An advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the questions can be specified and deepened in the interview based on the answers received (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022). This flexibility was particularly important in this study, as the supervisors led diverse teams and therefore faced varying challenges and experiences.

A total of eight interviews were conducted in March 2026 via Microsoft Teams video calls. All participants were supervisors from the commissioning division. This study utilized purposive sampling to select participants who were experienced with the phenomenon under investigation, aiming to gain rich and context-specific insights (Klenke, 2016). In this study, the primary criterion for selecting interviewees was their role in leading heterogeneous teams. The diversity of the teams encompassed differences in cultural backgrounds, age, gender, professional experience, and geographic location.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish to ensure a natural flow of conversation and to allow participants to express their experiences as accurately as possible. The interviews lasted 33 to 55 minutes, yielding approximately 100 pages of transcribed material. The

participants' managerial experience varied from 2 to 26 years, and team sizes ranged from 6 to 25 subordinates. An overview of the participants and interview details is presented in Table 1. This variance in managerial experience and team size introduced nuances regarding team scale and diversity into the data. Despite these diverse perspectives, recurring themes emerged across the interviews. This aligns with the concept of data saturation in qualitative research, where collecting additional data no longer generates new insights but rather confirms previously identified themes and concepts (Marshall et al., 2021).

Table 1: Overview of the interviews

Interviewee	Date	Length of interview (min)	Number of transcribed pages	Number of subordinates	Total supervisory experience (years)
I1	3.3.2026	38	11	13	21
I2	3.3.2026	55	16	6	2
I3	4.3.2026	49	14	25	10
I4	6.3.2026	49	14	15	7
I5	6.3.2026	41	12	8	26
I6	6.3.2026	33	9	25	5
I7	11.3.2026	43	12	7	3
I8	25.3.2026	41	12	10	18

Before the interviews, the participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage. They were also informed of the study's objectives and the intended use of the collected data. In addition, participants were notified that the interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed, and they received a privacy notice ensuring confidentiality throughout the research process. To protect anonymity, all participants are referred to using identifiers (I1, I2, I3, etc.).

The interviews were structured around pre-determined themes, but the format was kept flexible to allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives openly. The interview guide was developed based on the study's theoretical framework. It consisted of five main themes: 1) background questions, 2) everyday feedback and the supervisor's

role, 3) fostering a sense of belonging, and 4) uniqueness and valuing diversity, 5) closing questions. Under these main themes, specific sub-questions were formulated to explore how supervisors experienced these phenomena in practice and what concrete actions or challenges they encountered when leading their teams. This thematic yet adaptable format enabled interviewees to deepen the discussions and emphasize aspects that were personally significant to them (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

3.4 Data Analysis

The data for this study were analyzed using a theory-guided content analysis approach. This method was chosen because it is well suited to qualitative research, where the objective is not to uncover a single truth but rather to participate in the ongoing academic discourse by uncovering new perspectives and insights (Puusa et al., 2020). Furthermore, this approach is appropriate, as the research builds on existing theory while also aiming to generate new understanding grounded in empirical data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Because the relationship between workplace inclusion and feedback environment is an emerging area of research, maintaining flexibility is crucial for uncovering unexpected and new information (Marshall et al., 2021). Therefore, although the overall analysis was abductive, the initial coding phase was conducted inductively. This approach was chosen to ensure that the analysis was grounded in the supervisors' actual experiences instead of being constrained by existing theoretical frameworks (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

The interview data was analyzed in its original language, Finnish, to ensure that the findings remained as close to the participants' authentic experiences as possible. Translation into English was performed only during the final reporting stage when selecting quotes to illustrate the results. These translations were initially carried out with the assistance of translation software and AI. However, the researcher reviewed and refined all quotes to ensure that the original meaning and nuances of the participants' statements were accurate. It is essential to note that translated quotes may appear more formal than the original spoken statements and that the translation process itself can influence the interpretation of the findings.

The data analysis was conducted in several stages. The initial phase involved transcribing the interview data. Preliminary transcripts were generated using Microsoft Teams. To ensure accuracy, these transcripts were reviewed and corrected by listening to the original audio recordings. The transcription phase was the first step in the actual analysis. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2022) note, listening to and transcribing the interviews allows the researcher to begin mentally organizing the material and identifying early connections between the participants' accounts. The transcription and initial analysis were conducted in Finnish. This decision was made to retain the meanings of the original language and to prevent any loss of detail that might occur from early translation.

In the second phase, the transcripts were imported into MAXQDA, which served as the technical software for the analysis. Utilizing qualitative data analysis software supports the analytical process by managing large volumes of text and recording all methodological steps (Klenke, 2016). During this phase all relevant data related to the research were highlighted, and the practical coding process using MAXQDA began by identifying original expressions relevant to the research questions and reducing them into condensed codes (Marshall et al., 2021).

The condensed codes were compared across the dataset to identify similarities and differences. Based on these comparisons, the codes were grouped into data-driven subcategories. In the final phase of the process, the inductively formed subcategories were aggregated into main categories. These main categories were derived from both the themes that emerged from the interviews and the conceptual framework developed for this study. The main categories reflect the core dimensions of the research: supervisors' perceptions of an inclusive feedback environment, the supervisor's role, fostering belongingness, and valuing uniqueness. An example of the data analysis process is illustrated in Table 2 below, and the complete analysis table is presented in Appendix 2.

Table 2: Example of the data analysis process

Original expression	Condensed code	Subcategory	Main category
A new employee certainly needs more of that feedback and hands-on guidance, whereas for a person who has been with us for 20 years, it is perhaps more about discussing and thinking together. (I2)	Adapting to seniority	Individualized feedback needs	Valuing uniqueness
He might want clear KPIs or how they are measured, and this other person just wants somewhat general frameworks, and they are completely fine with being evaluated differently. (I3)	Tailoring goal-setting		
It depends on the individual's capacity to receive feedback. Some prefer just the straight facts without any extra talk. The other extreme wants to discuss and reflect thoroughly(...) (I8)	Adjusting to feedback capacity		

These methodological decisions and the resulting classifications form the foundation of this study's results. The main findings derived from the analysis are presented in the following chapter. The findings chapter is structured around the subcategories and main categories identified during the analysis. First, the supervisors' conceptualizations of an inclusive feedback environment will be presented. Then the chapter will examine the supervisor's own role as a facilitator of this environment, including the challenges they must navigate to sustain it. Following this, the focus will shift to how supervisors foster a sense of belongingness within their teams. Finally, the chapter will explore how they value individual uniqueness by recognizing different feedback needs and backgrounds.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Supervisors' Perspectives on Inclusive Feedback Environment

4.1.1 Conceptualizations of Inclusive Feedback Environment

Before examining specific leadership practices, it was first necessary to establish how supervisors conceptualized an inclusive feedback environment in their daily work. While the participants were acquainted with feedback and inclusion as individual concepts, the intersection of these two concepts was novel to them.

> *I have to say that this is a somewhat unfamiliar concept in Finland, or at least in this context. We rarely talk about something like an inclusive feedback environment or this kind of issue, so it's good that it is being brought more into focus. (I1)*

Despite the concept's unfamiliarity, supervisors' responses reflected many elements of an inclusive feedback environment recognized in the research literature. The interviews indicated that supervisors described the environment as rooted in strong psychological safety, where every employee could be their authentic self.

> *I would define it so that everyone can be themselves and we meet everyone where they are. (I7)*

This freedom to be oneself was linked to the absence of fear. Supervisors perceived that employees did not have to anticipate negative consequences when giving or receiving feedback. They argued that feedback must always be directed toward shared goals and work outcomes and never stigmatizing the individual's personal characteristics.

> *There is no need to fear any consequences. There is this psychological and otherwise safe environment, and the feedback is given focusing on what we want to achieve with it. And not somehow labeling the individual. (I2)*

The responses suggested that an inclusive feedback environment allowed everyone, regardless of background or role, to feel comfortable acting authentically. Furthermore, it ensured that all employees had an equal right to both give and receive feedback. Supervisors highlighted that feedback should be available to everyone, not only to those performing particularly well or poorly.

> *Everyone should be able to receive feedback, not just those who are performing well or poorly. As I said, I think it helps to know the people, so that I can consider how best to give either positive or constructive feedback. That way, the feedback can be delivered in a way that is tailored to the individual, if needed. (I3)*

The interviewees stressed that in an inclusive feedback environment, the feedback process itself must be fair and unbiased. The answers highlighted the importance of neutrality, ensuring that personal characteristics or assumptions about an individual do not influence the core message or prevent feedback from being given, regardless of how a person might be categorized.

> *Maybe I'd prefer to use a term neutrality, to emphasize that feedback should be given regardless of a person's background or any of the many ways people are categorized. No matter what 'box' someone might be placed in, feedback should still be possible. (I5)*

The supervisors considered it important that everyone received feedback regardless of their age, gender, or nationality. While they stressed that background should never determine if feedback was given, they noted that it often shaped how the message was delivered. The supervisors thought that true inclusivity required giving everyone the right to feedback while tailoring the tone to match the recipient.

> *The background of the person, whether you are a 60-year-old Indian man or a 27-year-old Finnish woman, it doesn't affect the content of the feedback, but it does affect the way I say it. However, the feedback must be able to be given. (I5)*

All in all, the supervisors conceptualized an inclusive feedback environment as one where everyone receives feedback, but the method of delivery is individualized. This view highlights that equality in feedback requires adjusting the communication style to respect each person's unique background, demonstrating that an equal message needs a tailored delivery.

4.1.2 The Supervisor as a Role Model

The findings revealed that supervisors viewed their own role as fundamental in fostering an inclusive feedback environment. They highlighted that such a climate must be supported through daily leadership behaviors, acknowledging that genuine inclusion cannot be mandated by official policies or delegated. Rather, the supervisor played a big role in bringing the environment to life and sustaining it over time.

> *As a supervisor, you definitely act as a role model and have a massive influence on how people actually experience the environment. (I6)*

> *My own role in this is certainly significant. How a supervisor approaches these issues has a huge impact on whether these matters are even perceived as important in the first place. (I2)*

The supervisors perceived that their actions and attitudes affected how team members acted around them. They could either positively reinforce the environment or undermine it. Therefore, supervisors viewed their own behavior and mindset as critical. They stressed that establishing an inclusive environment required alignment between what they said and their concrete actions. Espousing inclusive values was meaningless if the supervisor's daily actions contradicted them.

> *If I were to say that it is important to take everyone into account, but then there is a certain culture where we somehow laugh (...), then of course I am portraying what I say through how I actually act. It creates a certain climate and I know it catches on to many. So yes, how the supervisor acts has an absolutely huge significance. (I5)*

Because of this influence, interviewees underlined that their primary role was to model the desired behavior. They highlighted the importance of how supervisors themselves handle upward feedback. They understood that natural power dynamics often make subordinates hesitant to critique their supervisors. By reacting constructively and openly to criticism directed at them, supervisors sent a signal to the team that it is safe to speak up.

> *By reacting well when someone has given me corrective feedback, I have tried to encourage people, showing that hey, you can talk to me. I take it positively. If I am doing something poorly, I genuinely want to do better, so please tell me. (I3)*

Beyond merely modelling their own receptiveness, supervisors recognized their active responsibility for facilitating peer-to-peer feedback. They noted that an inclusive culture is truly established only when team members feel comfortable evaluating one another.

> *I am also responsible for ensuring that colleagues give feedback to each other, whenever a way for that can be found. For example, by reminding them in the moment that hey, around here it is allowed to give feedback to everyone, both positive and constructive. (I7)*

Supervisors further emphasized the effect their personal demeanor has on the team's climate. Although the whole team shared responsibility for the atmosphere, the supervisor’s attitude dictated the baseline. Supervisors had to practice self-awareness and regulate their own stress so it wouldn't negatively infect the team or hinder open communication.

> *When you have a lot of stress and a lot of things on your own plate, you just have to leave it behind. When you come in front of your subordinates, you cannot come with that energy that there is terrible stress and everything is bad, because it is contagious and people go into their shells and start walking on eggshells around you. (I6)*

In addition to avoiding negative stress, supervisors described the importance of their role in proactively making the team enjoyable. They wanted to enable a setting where people want to belong.

> *The better I can weave a common thread for the team so that they enjoy themselves and want to be in this team (...). I guess that is my main role here, to enable that kind of environment. (I1)*

The interviewees highlighted a gap between company-level policies and daily leadership. Even though the organization offered plenty of official feedback training and formal frameworks, making those concepts work in everyday life fell on the supervisor's shoulders. Supervisors felt that their role is to bridge this gap, recognizing that true leadership requires emotional intelligence, not just measuring output.

> *That's the official message, but then it pretty much rests entirely on the specific supervisor's responsibility how well these things are looked after. It's a very interesting aspect of this topic since it is about managing humans, not just about efficiency or engineering. (I2)*

In conclusion, fostering an inclusive feedback environment relies on the supervisor's active engagement. It requires the supervisor to look beyond formal HR processes, lead by example, and show the team how to give and receive feedback in an inclusive manner.

4.1.3 Challenges in Fostering an Inclusive Feedback Environment

While supervisors recognized their role in fostering an inclusive feedback environment, translating inclusive ideals into daily practice was rarely straightforward. The findings revealed that maintaining an inclusive feedback environment required constant navigation of various structural boundaries and interpersonal complexities.

A primary structural challenge for supervisors was a chronic lack of time. The pressure of urgent daily tasks and continuous operational demands sometimes overshadowed long-

term developmental goals. The proactive delivery of feedback was sometimes neglected because of intense workloads.

> *When you have so many tasks, you easily forget to express that feedback, it's a bit annoying that there is no time for it. You have to remind yourself or have it on the agenda in one-on-ones to remember to bring it up. (I7)*

> *There is so much of everything else, and when you only focus on the fact that things must be done, then those fires and managing them are always top-of-mind. But of course, in the long run, you must also remember self-development. (I2)*

Supervisors highlighted that the team's physical structure dictates leadership approaches. Managing a team where employees have varying amounts of physical presence required constant calibration. This dynamic was highlighted by one supervisor who reflected on the differences between managing remotely and managing in the office.

> *We primarily work at the office and are all physically present. And of course, from a leadership perspective, it becomes challenging if someone does a lot of remote work. It brings a challenge in the sense that leading a person doing hybrid work, versus leading people at office, brings completely different challenges for the individuals involved. (I8)*

Because remote employees operated autonomously, supervisors often lacked the direct visibility needed to provide specific and timely feedback. Supervisors noted that it made providing accurate feedback a lot more difficult.

> *From a supervisor's perspective, giving feedback is sometimes difficult because some individuals from our team are very independent and they do a lot of work without me having to or needing to monitor them. I see it as a challenge in an environment with experienced experts. How do you know or how are you able to give feedback when you cannot possibly be involved in everything. (I3)*

Closely tied to physical distance was the reliance on digital communication tools. Supervisors noted that relying on text-based platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, often made interactions feel impersonal. The lack of immediate emotional resonance made continuous feedback more challenging to convey naturally. Without the nuances of tone and body language, constructive feedback could easily be misinterpreted, making supervisors more hesitant to address sensitive issues.

> *When we talk so much just on Teams and just by writing (...) somehow, if you talk face-to-face with someone in the office, a completely different feeling is conveyed, and just writing text can sometimes be a bit cold. (I7)*

Furthermore, team size and composition impacted these dynamics. Supervisors observed that psychological safety and active participation were much harder to develop in large and diverse groups. In these settings, speaking up required a higher threshold of courage, forcing supervisors to rely on alternative methods to gather feedback. This forced supervisors to constantly balance public group discussions with more private feedback conversations.

> *Sparking a conversation is always a bit difficult. The smaller the group, the better it gets going. If you have 40 mechanics or 40 people from different personnel groups, it's quite difficult. You know that maybe one or two people will comment on something. But then, of course, anonymous channels are a good way to openly share views. (I8)*

Another challenge was the organization's operational language since some of the teams were multinational and English was used as the corporate language. In those teams, supervisors observed a decline in spontaneous discussion, as employees with lower confidence in their English skills sometimes struggled to express their thoughts and feelings. This meant that supervisors had to exert more effort to facilitate meetings, drawing out opinions to ensure everyone's voice was heard.

> *One thing I will bring up is that we use English. Even in weekly meetings, it greatly affects how much discussion there is, and it requires more*

> *facilitation in terms of asking questions and asking someone what they think about this. (I3)*

While active facilitation was necessary, supervisors noted that it was a delicate balancing act. They wanted to ensure equal participation but feared making employees uncomfortable by forcing them to speak.

> *But then it is also a bit difficult that you don't want to put anyone on the spot, like alright, say something now, so that is also challenging. It is a bit of a balancing act. (I7)*

Beyond structural constraints like time and language, supervisors struggled with emotional and interpersonal complexities, particularly when delivering corrective feedback. The data revealed that confronting underperformance was emotionally exhausting, often leading supervisors to procrastinate out of fear of the recipient's reaction. Supervisors admitted that feedback situations trigger emotional responses on both sides.

> *Yes, they are often such situations that we receive them emotionally on both sides. (I5)*

Even when supervisors initiated corrective feedback, maintaining authority under pressure proved difficult. Supervisors admitted a tendency to become overly accommodating when employees presented excuses, making it hard to enforce the necessary changes.

> *I tend to easily start backing down a bit from what I was supposed to say. For me, the hardest thing is if there is a slightly more outrageous situation and the excuse comes that there was nothing to this, how can you manage to stick to that original message yourself. (I3)*

Forming a coherent, objective picture was particularly challenging when a supervisor received contradictory critical feedback from different team members. In these scenarios, delivering fair feedback became nearly impossible.

> *If there is this kind of critical feedback and you hear two completely different views and trying to form an overall picture from that. If your view is completely different from what someone else has brought to me (...) sometimes there have been situations where in the end it feels like I don't know, maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle, but I cannot say what actually happened. (I5)*

Interpersonal challenges were also influenced by shifting power dynamics and hierarchical structures. For instance, when individuals transitioned from peer roles into supervisory positions, they struggled to balance their new authority with past friendships.

> *Well, with some I am an old colleague (...) sometimes it is perhaps a bit hard to draw the line that I am the supervisor. At least in the beginning, I tried to balance it a bit so that I wouldn't fall too much into that colleague role. (I7)*

These hierarchical structures made the practice of upward feedback difficult. Even though supervisors encouraged their teams to evaluate them, the power imbalance created a natural hesitation.

> *There is a clearly higher threshold, and yes, my own supervisors have asked me for feedback, and it is a bit of an awkward spot for myself to perhaps give terribly critical feedback upward. You have to be quite careful there. (I6)*

The findings demonstrated that the supervisors' professional experience acted as an enabler. Especially for less experienced supervisors, it was sometimes difficult to give constructive feedback. Less experienced supervisors often felt more self-conscious and worried about saying the wrong thing in sensitive situations.

> *In the beginning, the idea of having to give constructive feedback was a difficult thought for me, and it was uncomfortable when I first started in the supervisor role. I feel that the supervisor training gave me good guidance, and I am not as hesitant about it anymore. It simply took me a while to grow into the role where guiding the work is such an everyday part of it. (I2)*

In contrast, experienced supervisors who had worked for decades in leadership roles tended to rely on professional intuition. Over time, they had built a broader set of skills for handling different reactions, which helped them stay more confident when dealing with resistance or strong emotions in their teams.

> *I have quite a long experience, and over the years, I have been able to adjust my way of working so that there are no surprises. We recently had a 360-degree evaluation and it is a quite good calibration, noticing that I know pretty well where I stand regarding both positive and constructive feedback (I5)*

Supervisors recognized that fostering an inclusive feedback environment required a high degree of emotional intelligence and acceptance of uncertainty. Leading people proved to be different from managing routine tasks, demanding resilience in the face of both operational constraints and human complexities.

> *It's probably not easy for a corporation to guide or mobilize supervisors, especially as teams are becoming increasingly complex. You're expected to take everyone into account, but at the same time it shouldn't feel forced or artificial. It often feels like you have to tread carefully all the time, trying to figure out what the best approach really is. (I2)*

To conclude, challenges of fostering an inclusive feedback environment are related to the working environment and situation as well as the supervisors' individual capabilities. A chronic lack of time, a lack of physical presence, team composition, and language barriers are examples of situational constraints. Concerning the supervisors, interpersonal

complexities, emotional characteristics and skills impact the fostering of inclusive feedback environment. Supervisors' professional experience and emotional intelligence are noted as enablers in managing these challenges.

4.2 Fostering Belongingness

4.2.1 Open Feedback Climate

Supervisors pointed out that an open feedback climate was a foundational element for building a strong sense of belonging. A trusting relationship between supervisors and their subordinates enabled the teams to share both negative and positive feedback. They supported an atmosphere in which team members felt psychologically safe to be their authentic selves and to discuss issues without fear. Mutual trust lowered the threshold for daily interactions and enabled honest communication.

> *A safe atmosphere in the team, being able to be oneself, and precisely giving feedback. We can discuss things quite informally and talk about grievances. (I7)*

> *My subordinates and I have a confidential relationship, so we dare to share such good and bad things. (I3)*

Another aspect of an open feedback climate was normalizing constructive criticism and differing opinions. Supervisors sought to remove the stigma from corrective feedback, treating it as a standard procedure. Supervisors encouraged open disagreements, viewing critical feedback as a valuable learning opportunity for the entire team to share experiences. Supervisors highlighted that it is acceptable for people to disagree, and one supervisor even pushed subordinates to practice upward feedback by having them critique the supervisor's own work.

> *In these development discussions (...) I have made it a habit that I also ask for feedback about myself. I said that this meeting will not end until I get*

> *some feedback, and also that corrective feedback must be given. Someone has to figure out how I can do better. (I5)*

In addition to normalizing criticism, an open feedback climate was sustained by public positive reinforcement. Supervisors recognized that while constructive feedback is necessary for course correction, highlighting successes was seen as a far more effective motivator.

> *Positive feedback motivates much better than constructive feedback. Of course, if something is completely messed up, you have to give it but otherwise, I would say that positive feedback motivates people to better performance. (I6)*

The supervisors noted that praise was most effective when it was not limited to formal appraisals or private meetings. Rather, they made a habit of sharing positive feedback in everyday situations. The supervisors recognized extra effort and celebrated team successes, which strengthened shared goals and team cohesion. This everyday recognition ensured that employees felt seen and valued by their peers.

> *I try to remember as much as possible about all these positive things and going the extra mile, and I just openly hype them up. I am not ashamed or shy to praise that you have done a great job. (I2)*

While positive feedback was the primary driver of motivation, supervisors needed to support a culture free of fear of making mistakes. By normalizing mistakes and encouraging open disagreements, supervisors reframed critical feedback as a collective learning opportunity. They ensured that employees faced no negative consequences for providing critical feedback.

> *There is no need to fear any negative consequences from giving feedback. Rather, there should be a psychologically safe environment where feedback could be given in all directions. (I2)*

In conclusion, the findings indicated that an open feedback climate is not merely about the mechanics of delivering performance evaluations, it is a critical tool for building belongingness. When supervisors normalize mistakes and constructive feedback, demand upward feedback, and celebrate successes, they signal to employees that they are valued and integral members of the team.

4.2.2 Fairness and Equal Treatment

In fostering a sense of belonging, supervisors also underlined the significance of fairness and equal treatment. In this context, an inclusive feedback environment was defined as a space where the opportunity to engage in feedback was accessible to everyone, ensuring that no individual felt excluded. Supervisors felt that it was important to treat everyone fairly and equally, no matter what.

> *An equal feedback environment means that everyone has the opportunity to give and receive it, and it does not exclude anyone from it. (I7)*

> *I really want to be fair and equitable. I certainly do not tolerate anyone being treated differently in any way. (I2)*

Supervisors noted that although they adapted their communication styles to suit each employee's needs, the core organizational values and standards of respect had to be the same for everyone. By holding every team member to the same fundamental rules and professional expectations, supervisors prevented favoritism. They monitored their own behavior to prevent any differential treatment, ensuring that their leadership remained impartial. The interviewees recognized that diversity was best utilized when different personalities could collaborate under a set of shared rules.

> *In my opinion, there must be shared values for everyone and they must be followed. You can adapt the nuances and emphases, but those basic prerequisites must remain the same for everyone. (I2)*

The commitment to fairness was most tested when supervisors had to deliver corrective feedback. To protect trust and psychological safety, interviewees underlined that criticism must be constructive and considered. A key aspect of this consideration was transparency, as supervisors felt that fairness required explaining the context and the issue to the employee.

> *When you give that feedback, if it is critical or constructive, you bring out the whole context there, so you don't just blurt out the feedback itself, but you kind of express the whole issue first, what this relates to and why this has to be said now. (I7)*

Supervisors ensured the employee understood the reasoning and felt respected by grounding the feedback in a clear and objective context. Furthermore, timing and setting were also considered crucial elements of fair treatment. This meant that supervisors had a rule of praising in public and correcting in private.

> *If there is any corrective feedback, it is done one-on-one. Then, if there is some praising feedback, I prefer it to be when others can hear it too. (I5)*

By ensuring that criticism was private and based on objective performance rather than personal dynamics, supervisors protected their employees' professional dignity. This approach prevented employees from feeling unfairly targeted. Maintaining the level of objective fairness required supervisors to combat their own biases and prejudices. Supervisors evaluated situations to ensure their interventions were empathetic and equitable, without letting personal assumptions dictate their response.

> *It should be constructive and fair, there shouldn't really be those prejudices, and I think it is important to consider people's backgrounds and their perspectives. (I3)*

To operationalize the objectivity, supervisors noted that there were always multiple perspectives to consider. For instance, when receiving critical feedback about a team member from a third party, supervisors provided the employee with an opportunity to

share their version of events. This ensured that any conclusions drawn were fair and that the feedback process remained equitable.

> *If there isn't a clear overall picture of what has happened, I won't start blaming anyone until I've heard the other side's perspective and formed a complete understanding of the situation. (I5)*

Fairness and equal treatment are conceptualized as the consistent application of shared professional standards across all employees. In practice, supervisors enact this by positioning themselves as objective reference points within the team. They uphold employee dignity by setting and maintaining clear boundaries and demonstrate impartiality by considering multiple perspectives before forming judgments in conflict situations. This also involves an ongoing commitment to identifying and mitigating personal biases, thereby contributing to a work environment perceived as safe and equitable.

4.2.3 Facilitating Participation

According to all supervisors, facilitating participation within the team was a crucial element in creating a sense of belonging. The interviewees recognized that in diverse groups, natural conversational dynamics often led to imbalances, where certain individuals dominated while others remained passive. Supervisors viewed it as their responsibility to manage meetings and ensure that conversational space was distributed equitably. They utilized light facilitation techniques to restrain overly vocal members and create room for others to contribute.

> *I have this one guy who talks a lot, so sometimes I have to say, hey, now you must stop, it's someone else's turn to speak. We have agreed that I can say this to him. These are light facilitation things to get voices heard. (I3)*

While restraining dominant voices was necessary, supervisors simultaneously needed to invite quieter individuals into the conversation. They recognized that silence does not

equate to a lack of knowledge, but rather a different communication style that required direct encouragement.

> *If you want to get some input from these people who are a bit quieter, then of course you just have to ask them directly because certain people dominate. And that's just how it is, so you have to ask them directly so they can get involved in the discussion, because some individuals of the group are not necessarily the type to automatically take up space themselves. (I6)*

To ensure that all voices were heard, some supervisors employed structured turn-taking during team discussions. They observed that when everyone is guaranteed a space to share their perspective, the team reaches a better mutual understanding and commits more strongly to shared goals. One supervisor described this specific facilitation method as listening leadership.

> *I try to practice listening leadership. It means we use a method where everyone literally gets their turn to speak. After everyone has given their feedback, the team just understands the whole picture better. And people are definitely more committed to things when they've been an active part of it. (I3)*

By intervening structuring conversations, supervisors protected the quieter employees from being overshadowed, sending a clear message that every team member's perspective was equally valued. Supervisors emphasized that participating and sharing knowledge was not merely a personality preference but a professional obligation that applied to everyone, regardless of how loud their colleagues were.

> *Of course, some are louder, but the quiet ones also need to speak. Because they also have the same responsibilities towards the customers, it is part of their job, even if we have these louder ones taking up the space. (I4)*

However, supervisors also recognized a delicate balance, meaning that speaking up should never be forced. Particularly, larger group settings made it more difficult for

quieter individuals to speak up. If quieter team members were hesitant to share their thoughts in a group setting, supervisors opted to ask for their input privately afterwards. They acknowledged that putting employees on the spot is counterproductive and an unsuitable method for an inclusive environment.

> *In group situations, I've felt that you shouldn't forcefully push it, but then maybe rather do it one-on-one. (I2)*

By shifting the feedback conversation to a more private setting, supervisors ensured that the employee's voice was still captured without compromising their emotional safety.

> *For some, it is difficult to give feedback when there are a lot of people around, or there is a higher threshold for expressing their opinion in large groups. In such situations, of course, we can go through it in a smaller group. (I6)*

Beyond daily meetings and one-on-ones, supervisors employed broader structured methods, such as workshops, to democratize the feedback and ideation process. This allowed individuals who needed more time to process their thoughts to contribute on an equal footing. Ultimately, the supervisors perceived their primary function not as authoritative dictators, but as enablers whose main job was to remove barriers to participation.

> *I somehow just think that my task is to enable the best possible working conditions for them, and that I am just in a so-called supporting role. And if I focus my time on finding out what is not working or what could be better, then that is probably quite a good direction. (I2)*

> *When we have had a lot of new development, I take feedback and ideas from the team and organize workshops, because they know best how the work gets done best. (I8)*

Alongside direct facilitation from supervisors, teams also utilized peer recognition practices that encouraged employees to highlight colleagues' strong performance. This peer-to-peer praise served as a tool to validate individuals and further cement a shared sense of belonging.

> *We have had this habit of kind of snitching on a colleague for good performance, and then they are rewarded in the weekly meeting. (I3)*

Facilitating participation is a key supervisory practice for fostering belonging. Supervisors balance structuring discussions, encouraging quieter employees to contribute, and managing more dominant voices to ensure equitable participation. They also adapt their approach to different group dynamics, often using smaller or more private settings when needed. Supervisors position themselves as enablers who remove barriers to participation and support inclusive dialogue.

4.3 Valuing Uniqueness

4.3.1 Understanding the Individuality of Team Members

The foundation of valuing uniqueness was rooted in the supervisors' desire to understand their subordinates as individuals. The interviewees underlined the importance of looking beyond the workday to understand the broader context of an employee's life, which could influence how and when feedback was delivered.

> *You always have to remember in feedback that a person is always a whole. A person is at work for 37 to 40 hours a week, but a week has 168 hours, and that fits a lot of things other than being at work. If you know that they are having a really tough time outside of work, of course it must be taken into account when giving feedback. (I5)*

However, while supervisors recognized the importance of knowing their employees on a personal level, they also acknowledged the need to respect professional boundaries. They understood that building a personal connection does not require employees to overshare

details about their private lives. Instead, the goal was to acknowledge their humanity beyond their professional role, which created a foundation for trust. Supervisors noted that navigating this boundary required sensitivity, as employees had different preferences regarding how much of their personal lives they wish to bring into the workplace.

> *No one has to open up about everything in their private life. But the fact that you see the person, and not just that here is a colleague we do this work with generally helps with belongingness and smooth cooperation. (I2)*

> *Some clearly have a greater need to talk about work matters, but then also about their own personal matters, and then some have very little need for that... you just notice that there are different personality types, and you just adapt accordingly. (I7)*

The depth of the personal relationship and familiarity between the supervisor and the employee dictated the feedback dynamics. Supervisors noted that a strong pre-existing relationship made the exchange of both positive and constructive feedback much more natural. When dealing with new team members, supervisors felt the need to step back and observe before intervening.

> *If I have an immediate relationship with someone, then giving feedback is much easier. With others, it took a bit more time to build that trust. (I6)*

> *How a person reacts to feedback, and actually it doesn't matter whether it is corrective or positive feedback. If I know someone better, it definitely changes the way I give that feedback. (I5)*

Understanding individuals meant accepting their diverse ways of working. Supervisors recognized that because every employee has a unique personality and cognitive style, they approach their daily tasks differently. The interviewees stressed the importance of accommodating these individual differences without judgment, emphasizing that employees are not identical resources, but individuals whose unique human traits should be respected in how they manage their work.

> *Especially since people are not like me, they do things differently (...). Things can be done differently than how you would do them, as long as the result is there. (I4)*

The research revealed that an understanding of an employee is essential for formulating effective feedback. Because recognizing individual nuances is so demanding, supervisors emphasized that success in these interactions relies on their social skills and experience.

> *Being able to take the recipient into account requires a lot of practice,* and *it can also depend on one's natural emotional intelligence. (I6)*

By using their emotional intelligence to understand the person behind the professional role, supervisors can tailor their feedback to resonate with everyone's cognitive style and current life situation. An individualized approach ensures that the feedback is heard and embraced, preventing the employee from feeling misunderstood during the interaction.

4.3.2 Individualized Feedback Needs

One aspect of valuing uniqueness was supervisors' ability to recognize that employees have different feedback needs. The findings indicated that these needs were dictated by several factors, most notably by an individual's professional competence and seniority within the organization. Supervisors noted that while junior employees required more instruction, senior experts thrived on collaborative dialogue. Navigating these differences required supervisors to understand how to provide feedback based on employees' positions in their career paths.

> *A new employee certainly needs more of that feedback and hands-on guidance, whereas for a person who has been with us for 20 years, it is perhaps more about discussing and thinking together about the best way to proceed. (I2)*

Consequently, differences in support needs influenced the frequency of feedback. Supervisors adjusted their meeting structures to ensure that newer employees received more frequent guidance and attention.

> *I have had a habit where for the more experienced it is once a month, but if they have been here for under a year, I have held one-on-ones every two weeks. (I3)*

> *With senior roles, there is no need to hold their hand or show them what to do. But then when the new one came, a newly graduated young person, I noticed that I probably should actually be a bit more present there. (I4)*

Supervisors noted that the different needs were also influenced by the employees' professional backgrounds and cognitive preferences. They needed to adjust the framing of their discussions to align with the employee's expertise and working style. For instance, interacting with technical employees required specific technical examples, whereas others needed a completely different approach. The level of structure in performance evaluation was tailored to individual needs. Long-term team members exhibited varying preferences for goal setting, and supervisors adapted to these expectations to maintain motivation.

> *He might want clear KPIs or how they are measured, and this other person just wants somewhat general frameworks, and they are completely fine with being evaluated differently. (I3)*

Recognition of different needs also translated into how supervisors structured their feedback routines. Supervisors observed that some individuals craved regular praise and continuous feedback, whereas others felt content and motivated with much less frequent interaction. Moreover, the time required for feedback varied among individuals. Supervisors adjusted both the duration and the frequency of their one-on-one meetings to match these individual needs.

> *It is also important to notice to give enough praise and regular feedback, but for some others, you don't need to give that much feedback. They say*

> *that everything is going well and communication works, so they don't need any more feedback. (I2)*

This variation is closely tied to the depth of the conversation required. Supervisors observed that the time required to process feedback depends on the individual's communication style, prompting them to adjust meeting durations accordingly.

> *It depends on the individual's capacity to receive feedback. Some prefer just the straight facts without any extra talk. The other extreme wants to thoroughly discuss and reflect on different perspectives. This completely dictates how much time I need to reserve and how I structure the conversation. For one person, giving feedback takes five minutes, while with another, we might sit and talk for an hour or two. (I8)*

Recognizing individual differences was critical when supervisors needed to deliver corrective feedback. The interviewees emphasized that employees have different capacities for receiving criticism. A few supervisors used the term feedback receptivity, noting that there is a wide spectrum in how team members process critique. Supervisors continuously assessed where an employee fell on this spectrum to determine the appropriate level of directness. They had to assess whether an employee would accept direct feedback or adopt a defensive stance. Acknowledging this sensitivity did not stop supervisors from addressing performance issues, but it did require them to strategize their approach and consider the recipient's potential reaction beforehand.

> *Of course, I have had subordinates who are a bit more sensitive, and they might dwell on it for a while (...) so we have sometimes had to do such debriefings, because often people might develop fears that they have completely failed. (I6)*

The need for continuous debriefings highlighted the psychological weight of corrective feedback. To prevent such fears of failure and to mitigate emotional distress, supervisors learned to calibrate their directness based on the recipient's profile. While some team members thrive on straightforward critique, supervisors recognized that others require a

more guarded approach. Interviewees pointed out that caution in this context often meant providing extreme detail. When dealing with individuals prone to critical reactions, ambiguity could easily be interpreted as a personal attack. Therefore, supervisors found that anchoring the critique in specific, task-oriented examples was an effective strategy for bypassing defensiveness.

> *To someone you can just say that project XYZ could probably be done differently, and I know they will take the feedback. With someone else, I have to give feedback very detailed, and sometimes there are people with whom you have to be very cautious. (I5)*

> *For some, it is really difficult to give constructive feedback, and they react to it quite critically and don't take it very well. For them, you have to say very specifically what could have been done differently. (I7)*

To manage diverse sensitivities, the interviewees reported that using situational awareness and modifying their behavior to suit the individual were fundamental requirements for effective leadership. Supervisors viewed this adaptability as a strength that required constant, conscious calibration to ensure their message was received properly by different personalities.

> *I try to encounter them as individuals, and it is perhaps one of my strengths that one must adapt one's own actions and behavior in different situations. (I2)*

> *It requires situational awareness, understanding that for this person, feedback goes through this way, and for another in a different way. (I5)*

> *If I know that they can handle it, I have the courage to say it directly. But sometimes it feels like there is a wall between us, so I have to deliver feedback much more carefully. (I8)*

Although the communication was individualized and empathetic, the interviewed supervisors also established clear professional boundaries for how emotions were handled within the feedback environment. They acknowledged the importance of allowing employees to express their feelings but maintained that the goal was to ensure the team remained functional and accountable.

> *I want to allow people to be a bit frustrated sometimes and I listen to those outbursts and then state that nevertheless, this is how we must act now, and then we just move forward. (I2)*

Individualized feedback needs require supervisors to continuously adapt the frequency, depth, and delivery of feedback. By combining situational awareness with clear professional boundaries, they are able to tailor their approach to different individuals while maintaining accountability and ensuring effective communication.

4.3.3 Sensitivity to Diverse Backgrounds

When fostering an inclusive feedback environment, supervisors brought up the necessity of understanding and respecting each employee's unique background. However, they also underlined that supervisors' sensitivity should never result in withholding feedback. Rather, interviewees noted that inclusion involves ensuring that all employees, regardless of their background, have an equal right to receive feedback and are also expected to participate in giving it. This perspective was grounded in a strong belief in fundamental human equality, reflected in the shared view that everyone should be treated with equal respect.

> *Regardless of a person's demographics or other background, they are entitled to receive feedback, and we must be able to provide it*. (I5)

> *We are all equal human beings.* (I8)

Supervisors highlighted that although the content and standards of feedback are uniform across employees, their delivery should be flexibly adapted to individual and other

differences. While adapting feedback delivery is necessary to accommodate individual differences, the interviewees noted that managing a diverse team adds cultural sensitivity as an additional layer of complexity. They maintained that while professional standards and project goals must be uniform for all employees, an inclusive environment requires cultural intelligence in communication. Therefore, the way a supervisor structures and delivers their message is consciously adapted to respect the recipient's background.

> *Of course, it matters personally if someone comes from a completely different culture but everyone has exactly the same goal, which is achieving the best possible result in the project. (I1)*

The findings indicated that feedback cultures vary, particularly regarding directness, the use of praise, and power distance. For instance, because the Finnish communication style naturally lacks positive feedback, supervisors had to emphasize their praise so that employees would take it in. Conversely, engaging with cultures accustomed to steep hierarchies posed different challenges, especially when it came to upward feedback. In these contexts, indirect communication styles and a cultural focus on maintaining social harmony made it harder to address performance issues or receive honest upward feedback.

> *Perhaps Finnish culture is a bit such that we don't naturally use very positive language, so I have consciously tried to improve on that, ensuring the positive feedback is actually noticed. (I7)*

> *It is very different in more hierarchical cultures, they often have a different kind of reverence for authority and the fear of losing face is much greater compared to Finland, where we have a flat organization. If something isn't working, they might try to avoid giving that feedback for quite a long time. (I6)*

The interviewees recognized that cultural backgrounds are not strictly tied to nationality, nor are they static. They observed that generational shifts can sometimes mitigate

traditional cultural barriers. As one supervisor reflected on their younger international team members.

> *I don't know if it's perhaps a generational shift or just an age factor, but they actually do give me direct feedback. (I6)*

Beyond demographics, supervisors also broadened the definition of culture to encompass professional subcultures within the organization. They noted that the specific departmental environment in which an employee works influences their receptiveness to feedback. The distinct operational priorities of different units mean that supervisors must tailor their feedback to the individual person and also to the professional context of their specific department. Recognizing these internal cultural differences was seen as just as crucial as understanding someone's national background.

> *Cultural know-how and the existence of culture do not necessarily mean whether you are from the north or the south, but whether you are from R&D, Sales, or HR. Each is its own culture, and people have different ways of receiving feedback based on their local culture. (I5)*

Navigating these diverse and intersecting cultures was not a straightforward task. It required continuous self-reflection to challenge supervisors' own personal biases. The interviewees recognized that unconscious assumptions can easily distort how feedback is delivered or interpreted, potentially harming the team's inclusive environment. Therefore, leaders must identify their biases to ensure objective and fair treatment for all employees. As one supervisor highlighted, this is an active and continuous process.

> *Everyone has these prejudices, so you have to be careful. You must dismantle that preconceived notion actively. (I6)*

While recognizing and respecting diverse backgrounds was essential, supporting a strong sense of belonging remained the goal. The interviewees saw diversity as an asset because by bridging individual differences with a shared sense of inclusion, diversity became a key enabler of team success.

> *Acknowledging the different backgrounds, but at the same time fostering a sense of belonging, I see that as an enabler. (I1)*

This enabling factor translated into enhanced leadership capabilities. Supervisors viewed navigating diversity as an opportunity to broaden their own professional competence.

> *I consider it a very valuable experience to lead people from different backgrounds. It really adds a lot to the toolkit, you have to think a bit differently and it is not so straightforward. (I6)*

> *It's simply a fact that the perspectives improve. You gain viewpoints you might not have necessarily thought of yourself, which creates these aha moments. In a different way, it really accelerates the innovation related to the product. (I8)*

The message in supervisors' feedback needs to be delivered in a respectful and sensitive manner to value recipients' cultural uniqueness. Cultural diversity is multi-layered containing national, generational, and work environmental aspects requiring the supervisors to have high cultural intelligence for efficient message delivery. This means that feedback must be adapted to each recipient which supports both understanding of the message and equality of receiving feedback.

4.4 Summary of the Key Findings

To conclude the empirical analysis, the primary findings of this study regarding how supervisors conceptualized and fostered an inclusive feedback environment are summarized in Table 3. The table categorizes the key findings into five themes: the conceptualization of the inclusive feedback environment, the supervisor's role, challenges, fostering belongingness, and valuing uniqueness.

Table 3: Key findings

	Key findings	Description
The concept of inclusive feedback environment	Psychological safety	An environment where employees can act naturally without fear of negative consequences when giving or receiving feedback
	Equality vs. uniformity	Understanding that while everyone has an equal right to feedback and faces the same professional standards, the method of delivery must be individualized
	Fair and unbiased	Ensuring that personal assumptions about an individual do not influence the core message or prevent feedback from being given
The supervisors' role	Daily actions vs. policies	Acknowledging that an inclusive feedback environment relies primarily on the supervisor's daily actions, not just formal organizational policies
	Role modeling	Aligning spoken values with actual behaviors and showing example with inclusive behaviors
	Active facilitation	Actively structuring interactions to ensure all voices are heard
Challenges	Structural challenges	Lack of time, physical distance, language, team size, and tools
	Interpersonal challenges	Emotions, maintaining authority, power dynamics, and hierarchy
Fostering belongingness	Open feedback climate	Building mutual trust, normalizing mistakes, and removing the stigma surrounding constructive criticism
	Fair and equal treatment	Upholding uniform professional standards, setting clear boundaries to protect dignity by mitigating personal biases and considering all perspectives during conflicts
	Facilitating participation	Positioning the supervisor as an enabler who removes barriers to dialogue, balances voices during team interactions, and adapts to group dynamics
Valuing uniqueness	Understanding the individuality of team members	Acknowledging employees' lives beyond work while respecting professional boundaries, using emotional intelligence to appreciate different personalities and work styles
	Individualized feedback needs	Adapting feedback based on professional competence, seniority, and personality, tailoring the directness and tone to suit the recipient's specific capacity to receive feedback
	Background sensitivity	Utilizing cultural intelligence to navigate diverse backgrounds, which requires continuous challenging of own personal biases and understanding differences in feedback culture

Supervisors conceptualized an inclusive feedback environment as one grounded in psychological safety, where employees can be authentic and exchange feedback without negative consequences, regardless of their background. While everyone is entitled to feedback and held to the same professional standards, inclusivity requires adapting communication styles to individual needs.

The study confirms that an inclusive feedback environment relies primarily on the supervisor's daily actions rather than formal policies. Supervisors recognized that to implement inclusion successfully, they must act as role models by aligning their spoken values with their actual behaviors. In addition to role modelling, supervisors emphasized their role as facilitators who structure interactions to ensure all voices are heard. By removing barriers to dialogue and fostering continuous feedback exchange, they create an environment where feedback is not just a tool for evaluation but a driver of team inclusion.

The accounts of the supervisors revealed that fostering an inclusive feedback environment required supervisors to continuously navigate both structural and interpersonal challenges. Structural barriers, such as a lack of time, physical distance in hybrid work models, language barriers, large team sizes, and reliance on digital communication tools, complicated delivery of feedback. Simultaneously, supervisors needed to manage interpersonal complexities, which included handling emotional reactions, maintaining professional authority during conflicts, and overcoming power dynamics and hierarchical structures that often hindered open and upward feedback. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that translating inclusive policies into practice is not a straightforward task, as supervisors must overcome a combination of challenges.

The methods supervisors use to foster an inclusive feedback environment can be divided into two main themes. The findings revealed that supervisors cultivate this environment by balancing employees' dual needs for belongingness and uniqueness. They built a sense of belonging through a trust-based, open-feedback climate where mistakes are normalized and constructive criticism is de-stigmatized, while ensuring fairness by applying consistent professional standards despite differences in communication styles. At the same time, they facilitated participation by ensuring all voices were heard, using structured approaches such as turn-taking and workshops, while maintaining voluntariness to respect individuals.

Valuing uniqueness was achieved by viewing team members as whole individuals, recognizing their differing feedback needs, and showing sensitivity to their backgrounds.

Using emotional intelligence, they adapted feedback to suit variations in personality, competence, and experience, adjusting tone and directness without avoiding important performance issues. They also applied cultural intelligence to understand how diverse backgrounds, professional contexts, and other factors shape the interpretation of feedback, while reflecting on their own biases. Instead of perceiving diversity as a challenge, the findings conclude that it is a strength that enhances feedback environment.

5 CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The primary objective of this study was to increase understanding of inclusive feedback environment from supervisors' perspectives and thereby contribute to the academic research on both workplace inclusion and feedback environment. The main research question of the study was: *How do supervisors contribute to the formation of an inclusive feedback environment within teams?* As a result of the study, it can be stated that supervisors contribute to it by operationalizing abstract inclusion goals into concrete feedback practices. Reflecting on the empirical findings and the theoretical framework, this study offers four theoretical contributions.

The first theoretical contribution of this study is synthesizing inclusion and feedback environment into one framework. By integrating these concepts, this study contributes to the existing literature by establishing feedback environment as a critical context for team inclusion. While previous literature has approached workplace inclusion as static HR practices or high-level organizational goals, its translation into everyday work practices has often remained unclear (Mor Barak et al., 2022; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). The empirical findings support literature emphasizing that inclusion is not merely a static organizational state, but rather a continuous and dynamic process constructed through daily interpersonal interactions (Chung et al., 2020; Ferdman, 2017). By synthesizing the seven facets of feedback environment (Steelman et al., 2004) with Shore et al.'s (2011) inclusion framework, this study illustrates that these concepts are interconnected and supervisor can act as a link connecting them in everyday teamwork.

Building on the theoretical framework, which positions the supervisor as the connecting link between inclusion and feedback environment, this study clarifies how inclusive leadership is enacted in daily team dynamics. Accordingly, the second theoretical contribution addresses the call for a more detailed empirical understanding of the specific supervisory behaviors that support team inclusion (Flores et al., 2019; Randel, 2025; Roberson & Perry, 2022). By examining how supervisors implement the principles of

inclusive behavior in their everyday leadership, this research provides concrete evidence of how the abstract concepts translate into practical actions.

To provide a more coherent understanding of the specific inclusive behaviors used by supervisors, this study contextualizes Randel et al.'s (2018) five categories of inclusive leadership into concrete feedback practices. Randel et al. (2018) identify five categories of inclusive leadership: supporting individuals as group members, ensuring justice and equity, sharing decision-making to strengthen a sense of belonging and encouraging diverse contributions, and enabling group members to express their uniqueness. Rather than describing what supervisors do, this study provides evidence of how these abstract ideals function in practice.

Regarding belongingness, the findings illustrate three key practices. First, supervisors support individuals as group members by normalizing mistakes to build psychological safety. Second, they ensure justice and equity by holding everyone to the same professional standards. Third, they practice shared decision-making by facilitating team discussions to guarantee equitable participation. Simultaneously, supervisors address the need for uniqueness through two approaches. They enable members to express their uniqueness by recognizing individualized feedback capacities, and they encourage diverse contributions by adapting their communication styles to respect differing cultural and professional backgrounds.

To support the main objective of this study, this thesis also explored how supervisors adapt their feedback approaches to accommodate individual differences and diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the third theoretical contribution highlights the necessity of a tailored approach to feedback delivery, demonstrating how supervisors accommodate individual differences to prevent assimilation. The theoretical framework establishes that for a feedback environment to be inclusive, it must balance employees' feelings of belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). According to Shore et al. (2011), fostering a sense of belonging without valuing uniqueness forces individuals to conform to dominant team norms, resulting in assimilation. To prevent this, this study demonstrates that supervisors must maintain uniform and objective professional standards in their feedback criteria which fosters belongingness while tailoring the

delivery of feedback to validate uniqueness. This contribution aligns with a growing body of literature that critiques standardized feedback practices, arguing that a one-size-fits-all approach fails to account for individual differences (Condrea & Iliescu, 2025; Dahling et al., 2017; Gabelica & Popov, 2020).

The necessity of a tailored approach is particularly evident in the context of unfavorable feedback. The findings show that supervisors protect their employees' sense of belonging and professional dignity by adhering to rules of fairness, such as giving corrective feedback in private while offering positive reinforcement publicly. At the same time, they address uniqueness by assessing each employee's distinct emotional capacity to receive criticism and adapting their delivery accordingly. This approach supports feedback orientation theory, which posits that individuals differ in their receptiveness to feedback and in their willingness to act on it (London & Smither, 2002). Because employees with low feedback orientation are less receptive and more prone to defensive reactions (Katz et al., 2023; Liao et al., 2023), supervisors strategize their communication to ensure that the guidance is not rejected.

Furthermore, this study aligns with other theoretical perspectives on individual differences, specifically regarding professional seniority and cultural values (Condrea & Iliescu, 2025; Elicker et al., 2019). The findings demonstrate that an employee's career stage alters their feedback needs. Consistent with the theory that age and experience stabilize feedback reactions (Condrea & Iliescu, 2025), supervisors adapt their leadership by shifting from hands-on guidance for junior employees to collaborative dialogue for senior experts. Navigating individual differences requires supervisors to account for diverse cultural backgrounds and varying levels of power distance (Elicker et al., 2019; Gabelica & Popov, 2020). Previous literature cautions against cultural bias in inclusive leadership models, noting that the understanding and experience of inclusivity can vary across different cultural contexts (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). A lack of cultural sensitivity can undermine even well-intentioned inclusion practices, which highlights the need for supervisors to adapt their inclusive behaviors to the specific needs of individuals (Shore et al., 2018; van Knippenberg & van Ginkel, 2022). The empirical findings support this, demonstrating that such cultural calibration is essential to prevent intercultural misunderstandings.

The final theoretical contribution demonstrates that an inclusive feedback environment does not emerge naturally especially in hybrid and dispersed teams. Instead, it requires continuous and proactive facilitation by supervisors. The findings show that in hybrid settings, informal feedback interactions are less accessible, which increases the perceived social costs of seeking feedback (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2007). To address this, supervisors must create structures that make feedback more accessible, such as scheduled meetings, visible availability, and proactively inviting feedback conversations. This supports inclusive leadership theories that emphasize the supervisor's role as an approachable and vulnerable role model (Coutifaris & Grant, 2022; Qian et al., 2018).

5.2 Practical Implications

Beyond theoretical contributions, this study offers practical implications for supervisors seeking to develop a more inclusive feedback environment within their teams. Moreover, this study offers practical implications for organizations aiming to support their supervisors in developing inclusive leadership practices.

The first practical implication highlights that inclusion is not primarily enacted through formal organizational initiatives, but rather through everyday interactions. While macro-level diversity programs signal an organization's commitment, their actual realization depends on how frontline supervisors translate these principles into daily actions. Therefore, continuous feedback represents a great opportunity for supervisors to foster inclusion because it can serve as a concrete mechanism by which employees feel valued and heard. However, translating the policies into practice is often hindered by daily realities. The findings reveal that supervisors sometimes avoid or delay giving feedback due to time constraints and competing task priorities, which reduce their availability for meaningful interaction and undermine the team's feedback culture. This implies that while formal training establishes a necessary foundation, genuine inclusion demands a continuous investment of time and effort. Leading people is different from managing standard tasks or technical processes. It demands continuous emotional regulation, resilience, and situational awareness.

From the organizational point of view this means that while supervisors must balance their daily priorities to prevent operational efficiency from overshadowing employee interactions, sustaining this balance requires structural support from organization management. Providing formal feedback training or establishing official inclusion policies is insufficient. To bridge the gap between policy and practice, organization must also help supervisors manage their workloads by establishing supportive organizational structures. For example, a survey or research study conducted among supervisors could be used to identify the factors that place the greatest burden on them. The information collected from supervisors could be used to lighten their burdens.

The second practical implication highlights the necessity of implementing concrete metrics to evaluate feedback environment. Having clear measurements motivates both supervisors and team members to engage in continuous feedback. With data-driven insights, supervisors can better understand their team's needs and find ways to improve their own leadership. Furthermore, based on the principle that what gets measured gets managed, formal metrics push leaders to prioritize these interactions. This approach gives organizations proof that inclusive behaviors are happening in everyday work and not just remaining as abstract policies. For example, organizations could set goals for the number of feedback conversations supervisors should conduct per month and track these interactions through HR systems to ensure consistent implementation.

The third implication underscores the importance of individualized feedback practices. The study reveals that equality in feedback does not imply uniformity. Ensuring that all employees have equal rights to give and receive feedback and are held to the same professional standards is essential for fostering fairness and a sense of belonging. At the same time, supporting individuality requires supervisors to adapt the style, directness, and frequency of their feedback to match each employee’s needs. This tailored approach requires supervisors to take the time to understand the person behind the professional role, including how each team member processes and responds to feedback.

However, customizing feedback requires a high degree of sensitivity toward background differences, as unconscious assumptions can affect the fairness of these practices. This highlights the role of mitigating unconscious bias in supervisory work. To ensure that

tailored feedback remains objective and inclusive, supervisors need to engage in ongoing self-reflection to recognize and question their biases. To facilitate this, organizations must support supervisors with training on cultural intelligence and unconscious bias, alongside tools for self-reflection. This helps supervisors recognize when their own assumptions are affecting how they manage and give feedback. Such support equips supervisors with the capabilities to identify how preconceived notions may shape their leadership behavior.

The fourth practical implication reveals that supervisors must act as facilitators of team-wide inclusion. Employees pay close attention to their leaders' words and actions, which allows supervisors to shape the climate of inclusion. Supervisors can break down hierarchical barriers by demonstrating vulnerability. When supervisors ask for and accept feedback on their own performance, they normalize the evaluation process. This creates a sense of psychological safety, making employees feel comfortable enough to speak up and share their concerns. Therefore, in addition to providing feedback themselves, supervisors are responsible for creating conditions that enable open feedback exchanges among all team members. This facilitative role is crucial in diverse teams, where differences in communication styles, cultural norms, and other differences may otherwise limit participation. In practice, organizations can support supervisors in this by providing them with tools and platforms for creating multiple feedback channels. For example, these can include avenues such as one-on-one conversations, team discussions, workshops, and anonymous options enabling employees to engage in ways that feel most comfortable.

The fifth practical implication points out the importance of fostering a stronger peer-feedback culture in hybrid work environments. Feedback should not be limited to supervisor–subordinate interactions but also emerge in everyday exchanges between colleagues. The findings indicate that supervisors may sometimes lack the direct visibility required for continuous feedback when managing independent or remote employees. Consequently, it is an ineffective strategy to expect supervisors to carry the entire feedback responsibility alone. Organizations can address this by training teams to give and receive constructive peer feedback. This empowers employees to support each other's growth and builds a shared sense of inclusion, allowing the team to thrive without relying constantly on a supervisor's input.

From a broader organizational perspective, workplace inclusion and feedback environment must be treated as connected constructs rather than isolated domains of development. Integrated training initiatives that combine these elements can equip supervisors with capabilities to manage diverse teams, recognize variation in feedback preferences, and adjust communication styles accordingly. However, even when organizational strategies are established and supervisors are trained, an unsupportive culture can ultimately defeat the strategy if there is no genuine appreciation for feedback. Therefore, improving the inclusive feedback environment requires small and deliberate everyday actions, supported by feedback mechanisms that are designed to be inclusive from the top down.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

When evaluating the study, it is important to remember that the evaluation starts from the initial research design to the final reporting of the results (Klenke, 2016). Because traditional quantitative metrics such as validity and reliability are often inadequate for qualitative research, trustworthiness is evaluated using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Moreover, a complete evaluation must address the researcher's role and ethics, acknowledge the study's limitations, and suggest directions for future research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

In qualitative research, the researcher's own role influences the study, making continuous self-reflection an essential part of the process (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). During the analysis, the researcher aimed to ensure that prior knowledge of theories did not dictate the results. This ensured that the findings were driven by the supervisors' actual experiences rather than the researcher's expectations. To strengthen the study's trustworthiness, the researcher aimed to maintain transparency regarding all methodological decisions.

Credibility addresses the truth value of qualitative research, whether the study captured the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way to strengthen credibility is to maintain a tight connection between the empirical data, the research

questions, and the theoretical framework (Puusa et al., 2020). In this study, the interview guide was developed based on the core concepts of inclusion and feedback environment, which ensured that data collection focused on the phenomenon being investigated. During the interviews, credibility was supported by asking clarifying questions to ensure the supervisors' experiences were interpreted accurately. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Data triangulation was achieved by interviewing supervisors from diverse teams, while theoretical triangulation was applied by integrating two previously separate conceptual frameworks.

Transferability assesses whether qualitative findings can be applied to other contexts and therefore requires a rich description of the research setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The context for this study was a Finnish division of a global technology firm, from which eight supervisors participated in the interviews. While this specific focus allowed for an in-depth understanding of the supervisors' subjective experiences, it limits the broader transferability of the results. The findings reflect the specific organizational culture and structural realities of this firm, meaning they may not be transferable to other industries or organizational sizes. However, although the sample size is small, transferability to similar knowledge-intensive contexts is supported by the data saturation achieved during the interviews (Marshall et al., 2021). Despite its contextual limitations, this study offers adaptable perspectives for supervisors and organizations aiming to create an inclusive feedback environment.

In qualitative studies, dependability serves the same purpose as quantitative reliability. It requires all research steps to be logical, transparent, and thoroughly documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because qualitative studies are tied to specific contexts, dependability relies on methodological transparency, careful description of the analysis, and justification of interpretations (Marshall et al., 2021). This study secured dependability by thoroughly documenting the entire research process. This involved providing detailed descriptions of data collection and transcription, explaining how MAXQDA software was utilized to manage the analysis, and illustrating how the study's conclusions were built directly from the original interview data.

Confirmability assesses the objectivity of the research, ensuring that the findings and interpretations are genuinely derived from participants' experiences (Shenton, 2004). To establish confirmability in this study, the supervisors' authentic voices were prioritized. Although the overall content analysis was theory-guided, the initial coding phase was conducted inductively. This prevented pre-existing theoretical frameworks from overshadowing the supervisors' perspectives. Confirmability is demonstrated throughout the findings chapter by the use of direct quotes, providing verifiable evidence that the conclusions are grounded in the data.

Ethics formed a core part of the study's evaluation, focusing on voluntary participation, data security, and anonymity (Puusa et al., 2020). Prior to the interviews, participants received a privacy notice detailing how their data would be processed and stored. They were informed of the research goals and reminded of their right to refuse questions or withdraw at any point. To guarantee anonymity, all identifying characteristics were removed from the data.

Beyond the transferability limitations related to the sample size and specific organizational context, this study has several other limitations that present valuable avenues for future research. The primary limitation of this study is its exclusive focus on team supervisors' perspectives. While capturing the managerial viewpoint is a distinct strength, revealing how supervisors navigate and shape feedback practices, it limits the study to one side of the interaction. As established in the theoretical framework, true inclusion depends on whether an individual personally feels valued and accepted as an authentic member of the group (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Shore et al., 2011).

Because this study did not collect data from subordinates, it cannot determine whether team members experience the feedback environment as inclusive. While the findings highlight that supervisors adapt their communication styles to respect individual differences, it remains unclear how these adaptations are received. Therefore, a natural avenue for future research is to explore this phenomenon from employees' perspectives. Investigating how subordinates perceive a supervisor's efforts to individualize feedback would reveal whether there is a disconnect between inclusive intentions and the employees' actual lived experiences.

Second, qualitative interviews dealing with leadership practices are prone to social desirability bias. Supervisors may emphasize their positive behaviors and downplay their shortcomings to align with the ideals of inclusive leadership. To gain a more objective understanding of daily feedback dynamics, future studies could utilize observational methods, or dyadic research designs that pair supervisors with their team members to compare their perceptions of the same feedback events.

Another limitation is that this study does not fully address the shift toward remote and hybrid work. Future research should investigate how supervisors build and maintain inclusive feedback environments in virtual settings. Studies could explore how leaders foster a shared sense of belonging and value uniqueness when physical distance eliminates informal interactions. Understanding these digital dynamics is crucial for updating inclusive leadership models to fit the realities of modern teamwork.

Finally, future research could expand the scope of inclusion and feedback in workplaces in several ways. Taking a longitudinal approach would be beneficial, allowing researchers to evaluate the long-term success of inclusive leadership training programs and determine whether they yield lasting changes in a team's feedback culture. Although this study approached feedback environment broadly, future studies should investigate specific processes like formal appraisals or peer feedback. Beyond feedback, it would also be relevant to examine how organizations support inclusion during other HR processes such as recruitment or onboarding.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview outline

Background questions

1. What is your current role and job title in the organization?
2. How long have you worked in managerial positions in general, and in your current role?
3. What kind of team do you currently manage (size, diversity, job description)?
4. How often do you interact with your team in everyday life?

Theme 1: Everyday feedback and the supervisor's role

5. How would you describe your team's feedback culture right now in your own words?
6. What kind of feedback is shared the most among you: praise, criticism, or constructive feedback?
7. In which directions does feedback typically flow in your team (e.g., only downwards from you, among team members, or upwards to you)?
8. How and to what extent do you manage to include, for example, feedback discussions and sparring in your everyday supervisory work?
9. Do you ever personally ask your team members for feedback on your own performance?
    a. If yes, how do you do it in practice?
    b. If not, is there a reason for this?

Theme 2: Belongingness

10. How would you describe your team's spirit? What factors unite your team?
11. How do you ensure in everyday life that every team member feels they receive an equal amount of feedback and support, regardless of their background?
12. What kind of atmosphere prevails in your team when corrective feedback is given? And how do you act when a mistake happens in the team?
13. How do you encourage the more withdrawn or quieter members of the team to bring their thoughts forward and give feedback?
14. How would you feel about sharing your own mistake with your team?

15. When making decisions together with the team, how do you ensure that everyone feels they are an equal and important part of the decision-making?
16. Critical feedback can easily make an employee feel like a failure or an outsider. How do you act in a demanding feedback situation so that the employee still has a strong feeling that they are a valued part of the team and belong to the group?

Theme 3: Uniqueness and valuing diversity

17. How would you describe your relationship with different team members?
    a) How does it affect the way you give and receive feedback with them?
18. Have you noticed individual needs related to feedback?
    a) What kind?
    b) How do you take individual needs or characteristics into account?
19. How do you ensure that even perspectives and ideas that completely deviate from the team's mainstream are heard and valued?
20. How do you react as a supervisor if an employee challenges the feedback you gave or completely disagrees with you?

Closing questions and challenges

21. Have you encountered situations where you deliberately chose not to give feedback?
22. What do you think is the hardest part about managing different types of people and giving and receiving feedback?
23. How do you define an inclusive feedback environment, and how do you perceive your own role in it?
24. Did any thoughts come to mind that I haven't asked about yet?

Appendix 2: Formation of codes and structure of data analysis

Original expression	Condensed code	Subcategory	Main category
I would define it so that everyone can be themselves and we meet everyone where they are. (I7)	Freedom to be oneself	Conceptualizations of inclusive feedback environment	Supervisors' perspectives on inclusive feedback environment
Everyone should be able to receive feedback, not just those who are performing well or poorly. As I said, I think it helps to know the people, so that I can consider how best to give either positive or constructive feedback. That way, the feedback can be delivered in a way that is tailored to the individual, if needed. (I3)	Feedback's availability to everyone		
The background of the person, whether you are a 60-year-old Indian man or a 27-year-old Finnish woman, it doesn't affect the content of the feedback, but it does affect the way I say it. However, the feedback must be able to be given. (I5)	Tailoring feedback's tone		
My own role in this is certainly significant. How a supervisor approaches these issues has a huge impact on whether these matters are even perceived as important in the first place. (I2)	Supervisors setting an example	The supervisor as a role model	
I am also responsible for ensuring that colleagues give feedback to each other, whenever a way for that can be found. For example, by reminding them in the moment that hey, around here it is allowed to give feedback to everyone, both positive and constructive. (I7)	Facilitating peer-to-peer feedback		
That's the official message, but then it pretty much rests entirely on the specific supervisor's responsibility how well these things are looked after. It's a very interesting aspect of this topic since it is about managing humans, not just about efficiency or engineering. (I2)	Emotional intelligence		
When you have so many tasks, you easily forget to express that feedback, it's a bit annoying that there is no time for it. You have to remind yourself or have it on the agenda in one-on-ones to remember to bring it up. (I7)	Supervisors' chronic lack of time	Challenges in fostering an inclusive feedback environment	
We primarily work at the office and are all physically present. And of course, from a leadership perspective, it becomes challenging if someone does a lot of remote work. It brings a challenge in the sense that leading a person doing hybrid work, versus leading people at office, brings completely different challenges for the individuals involved. (I8)	Team members' physical presence		

I tend to easily start backing down a bit from what I was supposed to say. For me, the hardest thing is if there is a slightly more outrageous situation and the excuse comes that there was nothing to this, how can you manage to stick to that original message yourself. (I3)	Emotional and interpersonal complexities		
A safe atmosphere in the team, being able to be oneself, and precisely giving feedback. We can discuss things quite informally and talk about grievances. (I7)	Psychological safety	Open feedback climate	Fostering belongingness
Positive feedback motivates much better than constructive feedback. Of course, if something is completely messed up, you have to give it but otherwise, I would say that positive feedback motivates people to better performance. (I6)	Highlighting success		
There is no need to fear any negative consequences from giving feedback. Rather, there should be a psychologically safe environment where feedback could be given in all directions. (I2)	Normalizing mistakes		
In my opinion, there must be shared values for everyone and they must be followed. You can adapt the nuances and emphases, but those basic prerequisites must remain the same for everyone. (I2)	Shared fundamental rules	Fairness and equal treatment	
When you give that feedback, if it is critical or constructive, you bring out the whole context there, so you don't just blurt out the feedback itself, but you kind of express the whole issue first, what this relates to and why this has to be said now. (I7)	Constructive and considered criticism		
It should be constructive and fair, there shouldn't really be those prejudices, and I think it is important to consider people's backgrounds and their perspectives. (I3)	Fair and objective feedback		
I have this one guy who talks a lot, so sometimes I have to say, hey, now you must stop, it's someone else's turn to speak. We have agreed that I can say this to him. These are light facilitation things to get voices heard. (I3)	Facilitating conversational space	Facilitating participation	
I try to practice listening leadership. It means we use a method where everyone literally gets their turn to speak. After everyone has given their feedback, the team just understands the whole picture better. And people are definitely more committed to things when they've been an active part of it. (I3)	Structuring team discussions		

I somehow just think that my task is to enable the best possible working conditions for them, and that I am just in a so-called supporting role. And if I focus my time on finding out what is not working or what could be better, then that is probably quite a good direction. (I2)	Removing barriers to participation		
A new employee certainly needs more of that feedback and hands-on guidance, whereas for a person who has been with us for 20 years, it is perhaps more about discussing and thinking together. (I2)	Adapting to seniority	Individualized feedback needs	Valuing uniqueness
He might want clear KPIs or how they are measured, and this other person just wants somewhat general frameworks, and they are completely fine with being evaluated differently. (I3)	Tailoring goal-setting		
It depends on the individual's capacity to receive feedback. Some prefer just the straight facts without any extra talk. The other extreme wants to discuss and reflect thoroughly(...) (I8)	Adjusting to feedback capacity		
Of course, it matters personally if someone comes from a completely different culture but everyone has exactly the same goal, which is achieving the best possible result in the project. (I1)	Respecting the recipient's background	Sensitivity to diverse backgrounds	
Everyone has these prejudices, so you have to be careful. You must dismantle that preconceived notion actively. (I6)	Challenging supervisor's own personal biases		
It's simply a fact that the perspectives improve. You gain viewpoints you might not have necessarily thought of yourself, which creates these aha moments. In a different way, it really accelerates the innovation related to the product. (I8)	Variety of viewpoints		