

The History of Feedback - The Untold Story

The history of feedback is rarely discussed in the media today. Many organisations, professional bodies and individuals in general are adopting new and more effective ways to give feedback, but many may not know where 'feedback' really came from...



Informal feedback occurs naturally everyday and has done so right from the beginning of time! Whilst the word 'feedback' did not exist until the 1920s, the use of feedback can be seen throughout history. This was before people could read and write. A time when cave art drawings were used to tell stories, signify ownership and serve as important landmarks. These drawings could be adapted and edited by other people, which brings us to one of the first ever instances of recorded feedback! The Romans also loved crowd-based feedback. Gladiatorial events were the equivalent of your Saturday night programme and crowd reactions fuelled the course of the event.

But even more recently we can see instances of feedback. About 300 years ago, America's founding father Benjamin Franklin was one of the first and most successful trolls! Franklin would often adopt fake names to harass local writers, a practice that has been taken up right into the online social media world of today. Audience based feedback, like the Romans is also used in the 21st century. Shows like the X Factor and Love Island have thrived off using feedback from votings to influence the course of the programme. Throughout history, informal feedback has occurred everywhere which begs the question- When did it all become so formal?

It is surprising to see that the word feedback is relatively new and was not born until the 1920s. As societies shifted towards technological innovations, electrical engineering first adopted the compound noun "feedback" in their work. Feedback was brought into a world of mechanisation but had a very different meaning to the most common definition in use today.

"The return to the input of a part of the output of a machine, system, or process"

When we first read this we may instantly think: *What on earth does this mean?* Unless you are from a technological background, it seems very alien! This first definition of feedback simply meant "returning to an earlier position". This does not sound very in line with the definition today, does it? Moving onto the 1930s, another definition evolved which we may be more familiar with. Ever received an unpleasant whining or whistling sound when working with technology? This is what we may call negative feedback and was starting to be used in the

1930s. Once again this is very technology driven, so when did feedback evolve from technology-oriented to the definition often used by businesses today?

This definition of feedback was not invented until the 1940s and was not in mass use until the 1960s! Psychology drove this new concept of 'Feedback' and contributes a lot to how we give feedback today.

So where is feedback today?

Feedback is a tool that is often used to improve performance at school, in employment, job searching, and many other areas of life. Looking at the history of the word, we can see how language changes over time and this shouldn't be scary- we should embrace it!

From history we can see we can see how the original definition was heavily influenced by the world of mechanisation and technology. In the 21st century, embracing technology has become so important in determining the success of many businesses (especially in the COVID-19 world)! When we give feedback, we need to ensure that we are embracing technology but also remember that humans are not robots! Feedback can become quite serious, monotone and mechanised in the workplace. We need to question: how can we get more creative and add more colour into the process?



Arts-based feedback is the answer. As we have seen through history, feedback has always taken place just not 'officially'. Many of the examples from the Romans to America's Benjamin Franklin can be considered to be very creative. Studies have shown the people are more receptive to feedback when delivered in certain formats! An interesting example is the feedback sandwich. This involves opening your feedback with a positive comment, then a negative, and then finishing with a positive. Feedback can be received more effectively and becomes a more positive experience for both the giver and the receiver.

So, What is the Feedback project aiming to do with the practice of giving feedback?

The feedback project is both innovative and exciting and has developed exceptional online tools to help improve the process of giving feedback through creativity! Through the [Feedback State of the Art report](#), you will receive inspiration on how you can change the way that you give feedback!

The goal of arts-based learning is not to teach people to be artists, but to create intense immersive learning experiences through artistic processes that facilitate new insights and perspectives.

Nissley, 2010

So, we have learnt today that feedback has been occurring informally forever. We just did not have a name for it back then. Feedback is also very changing. Businesses need to keep evolving the process by adopting the most up to date process and ways to give feedback.

Good luck on your feedback journey!

To visit the Feedback project website, [click here](#).

Resources:

- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/the-history-of-feedback>
- <https://medium.com/@carolsanford/a-short-history-of-the-concept-of-feedback-524b90ac6d71#:~:text=The%20term%20feedback%20originated%20in,safety%2C%20quality%2C%20and%20quantity.>
- <https://circa-navigate.corsairs.network/an-uncollected-history-of-feedback-648dff27d94a>
- <https://thehiredguns.com/what-is-a-feedback-sandwich>

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

