

Themes

Contextual Barrier Theme

Theme 5: Siloed organisational cultures inhibit the emergence of collegial feedback

This theme captures how participants locate the absence of collegial feedback not at the level of individual willingness, but within organisational cultures and structures that operate in siloes. Across accounts, staff described a lack of routine, collaborative feedback practices within courses or departments, resulting in feedback being experienced as sporadic or non-existent. Formal processes such as PRCs were not identified as collegial feedback, as they were individualised, line-management focused, retrospective and disconnected from collaborative work. In this context, siloed cultures both reflect and reinforce limited opportunities for collegial feedback and collaborative exchanges to develop and sustain.

Core Themes

Theme 1: Protected space/time signal that collegial feedback ‘counts’ as work

This theme captures how collegial feedback becomes possible when there is a culturally endorsed signal that partnership-building is legitimate, valued work rather than an optional extra. Participants emphasise the importance of stepping out of routine work settings and rhythms into a space—physical or symbolic—that grants permission for a different mindset oriented towards reflective, relational collaboration. In this framing, “protected” space and time function less as logistical resources and more as institutional cues that collegial feedback is worth attending to and sustaining.

Theme 7: Collegial feedback thrives when partnerships form organically, not by requirement

This theme captures how collegial feedback partnerships are more likely to form and be sustained when they emerge voluntarily through aligned interests, compatible objectives and mutual willingness to offer support. Participants contrast organically developed partnerships—experienced as chosen, respectful, and purposeful—with required or imposed feedback activity, which risks feeling performative or misaligned. Where partnerships are entered into by mutual agreement, colleagues can establish a shared basis for collaboration that makes continued feedback exchange feel worthwhile.

Theme 2: Meaningful, growth-oriented work underpins feedback in collaborative partnerships

This theme captures how collegial feedback becomes sustainable when collaboration is anchored in work that participants experience as meaningful because it supports personal or professional development goals. In contrast to routine day-to-day tasks—which may be valuable but are not always perceived as growth-oriented—meaningful projects provide a shared focus that justifies investment in feedback. When feedback is oriented towards aspiration and development rather than job performance, collegial partnerships are more likely to be experienced as worthwhile and sustaining.

Theme 3: Let's Be Honest About What We Want

Being upfront about “selfish” goals clarifies purpose and prevents imbalance and misunderstanding

This theme captures how collegial feedback is more likely to be effective and sustainable when partners are explicit about what they personally want from the relationship. Participants sometimes describe these motivations as “selfish”, particularly where feedback is tied to individual aspiration; however, making such aims visible supports clearer communication and shared understanding. When personal goals remain unstated, feedback risks becoming vague, platitudinal, or misaligned, and asymmetries in expertise or seniority can generate self-doubt or withdrawal. By articulating their stake in a specific collaborative endeavour, partners are better able to negotiate value, manage imbalance, and sustain engagement.

Theme 4: Specific Enough to Be Useful

Specificity makes collegial feedback credible, actionable, and worth sustaining (Specific Enough to Be Useful)

This theme captures how collegial feedback is experienced as useful when it is specific, timely and grounded in concrete work rather than general impressions. Participants contrast feedback that is offered at a moment when it can inform next steps with feedback that is retrospective, vague, or assumption-led, which is more likely to be reduced to platitudes and less likely to be taken up. Specificity is supported both by close collaboration – where partners have sufficient shared context to comment meaningfully – and by self-authored feedback questions that clarify what input is wanted and help prevent unsolicited advice crossing boundaries. In this way, timely and specific feedback functions as a condition for feedback to “land”, be acted upon, and remain worth sustaining.

Theme 6: Safety Makes Candour Possible

Psychological safety and reciprocity sustain vulnerability and candour in collegial partnerships

This theme captures how collegial feedback depends on psychological safety because it requires vulnerability: inviting critique, receiving constructive input, and engaging in honest, sometimes blunt, dialogue without fear of relational harm. Participants describe concerns about hurting feelings or making colleagues feel unwanted, which can lead feedback to be withheld or softened. Reciprocity and follow-up help sustain safety by signalling that feedback has landed, is valued, and forms part of a two-way relationship rather than one-sided labour. In this way, psychological safety and reciprocal acknowledgement make it possible for collegial partnerships to support candid, developmental feedback over time.