Corvinus University of Budapest

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Marketing Specialization

THESIS BOOKLET

The Strategic Dynamics of B2B Feedback: Asset Characteristics, Capabilities and Values across Supplier–Customer Relationships

Doctoral dissertation

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Contents

I. Research background and justification of the topic

Feedback is one of the central mechanisms through which organizations learn, adapt, and create value with their partners. Yet research on it has developed almost entirely in consumer markets. Business-to-business (B2B) relationships differ in ways that matter: stakes are higher and time horizons longer, exchanges are embedded in networks rather than in single transactions, and the parties depend on each other asymmetrically (Anderson et al., 1994, Ulaga and Eggert, 2006). Access to valuable customer information depends on long-term relational ties (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), and the knowledge exchanged is distributed across transactions, structures, and individuals. Feedback in such settings is not only a communication act but a resource whose characteristics, handling, and interpretation shape learning and performance.

The systematic literature review conducted as the first study confirms a gap: the overwhelming majority of published feedback research addresses B2C contexts, relies on quantitative designs, and rests on a narrow theoretical base. It offers little guidance for environments in which relational complexity, power asymmetry, and knowledge interdependence are pronounced (Bilro et al., 2023, Lambe et al., 2001), which justifies exploratory, theory-building inquiry rather than the testing of existing B2C frameworks.

It is also notable that prior studies rest on a narrow theoretical base, with Social Exchange Theory predominating (Blau, 1964; Molnár et al., 2024). This concentration leaves room for perspectives that have not yet been applied to feedback, and an exploratory design is well suited to introducing one. The present work therefore combines Social Exchange Theory, which is established in this literature, with the Resource-Based View including the dynamic capabilities perspective (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997), which have not previously been used to examine feedback. Applying the two in parallel allows feedback to be treated simultaneously as a relational exchange and as a strategic resource, and it is this combination that makes it possible to identify constructs which neither framework would surface on its own.

The empirical context is the Eastern European medical device and pharmaceutical trade, where feedback carries regulatory as well as commercial weight, transactions are frequently embedded in public procurement and reimbursement schemes, and the sector has received little scholarly attention regarding feedback.

The dissertation therefore asks: **How is feedback generated, interpreted, and acted upon in regulated B2B markets, and how do its drivers and processes shape its value-creating consequences?**

The question is answered through three studies and a cross-study comparison, which together form an article-based dissertation.

Multiple theoretical lenses are combined: the Resource-Based View (Wernerfelt, 1984, Barney, 1991) frames feedback as an intangible asset; the dynamic capabilities perspective (Teece et al., 1997) frames the routines through which firms generate and absorb it; and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) frames the relational conditions and the values attributed to the exchange.

The structure of this article-based dissertation is described in Figure 1.

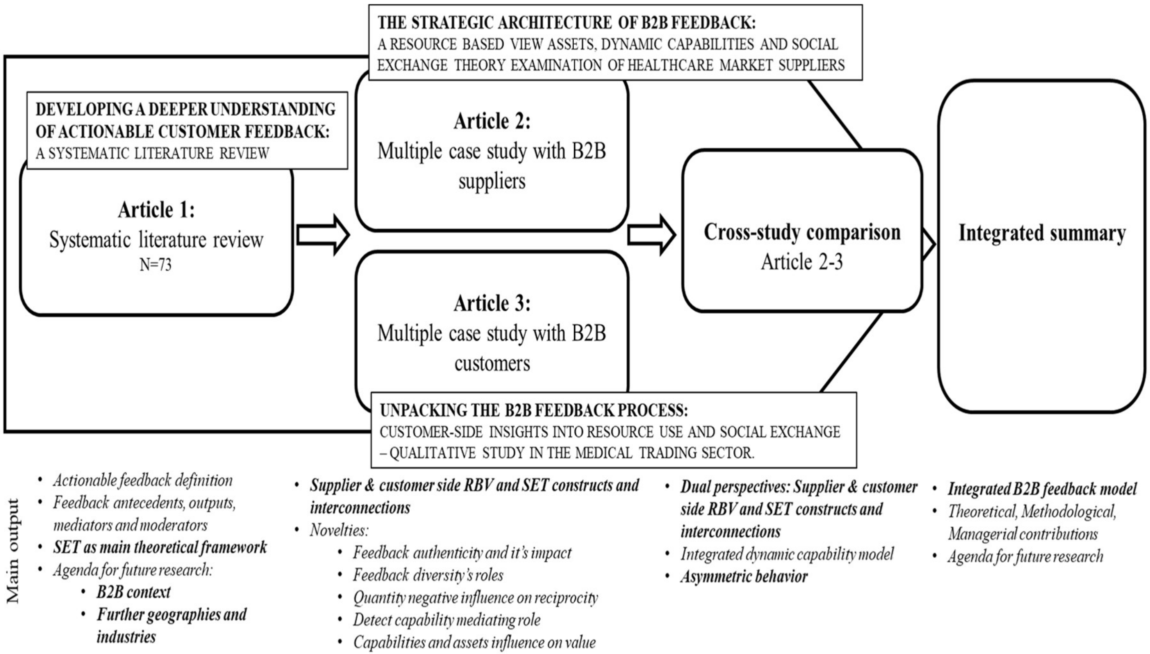

Figure 1: Structure of the article-based dissertation. Source: Author.

II. Methods used

Study 1: systematic literature review

The review followed established review methodology (Tranfield et al., 2003) and documented the selection process in a PRISMA-based model. Articles were collected from Scopus and Web of Science for November 2002 to November 2023, combining the terms feedback, customer feedback, consumer feedback, co-creation, brand, and brand value. After restricting the pool to Q1–Q3 journal articles (n=188), 21 were excluded for using feedback in a different sense and a further 94 after a closer reading of the abstracts, leaving 73 articles, each coded for industry, geography, method, sample size, theoretical framework, and variables examined.

Studies 2 and 3: dual-perspective qualitative inquiry

Study 2 covers seven supplier firms, that is, receivers of feedback: medical device distributors and representatives of device and pharmaceutical manufacturers, with informants at managing director, sales manager, and commercial manager level; interviews lasted 51 to 71 minutes. Study 3 covers six customer firms, that is, providers of feedback: wholesalers, distributors, retail operations, and hospitals. These interviews were conducted between July and December 2023 and lasted 32 to 49 minutes. Data collection ended at theoretical saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Both customer and suppler interviews were conducted in Eastern Europe, involving decision makers at Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Slovenian, Bulgarian and Kosovan firms.

Interviews were semi-structured and organized into five clusters: attitudes toward feedback; frequency and process; handling and responsiveness; perceived value and strategic implications; and roles and responsibilities. They were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to respondents for clarification. Publicly available data on revenues and employee numbers served as a check on firm size. Participating firms remained anonymous at their own request.

Analysis

Transcripts were analyzed with a hybrid inductive–deductive coding strategy (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, Proudfoot, 2023) in NVivo 15, in three stages moving from case-specific to generalized codes. Inductive coding first allowed themes to emerge from each case independently (Gioia et al., 2013); the resulting second-order categories were compared with established theoretical classifications; and in the third stage deductive reasoning grounded in the Resource-Based View, dynamic capabilities, and Social Exchange Theory consolidated them into aggregate dimensions (Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

This third stage is where the design departs from common practice: two frameworks were applied in parallel to the same material, which made cross-framework relationships visible and allowed constructs fitting neither framework, most notably feedback authenticity, to emerge. Two co-authors coded independently at each stage and compared their classifications, and the analysis followed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

The supplier and customer respondents do not form matched dyads, so the two studies were analyzed separately. Because both draw on the same industry and comparable geographies, their results can nevertheless be compared systematically, and this comparison exposes the asymmetries reported below.

III. Scientific results of the dissertation

The results are presented as nine thesis points; propositions formulated for later quantitative testing (presented also in Figure 2-3) are listed under the thesis to which they belong.

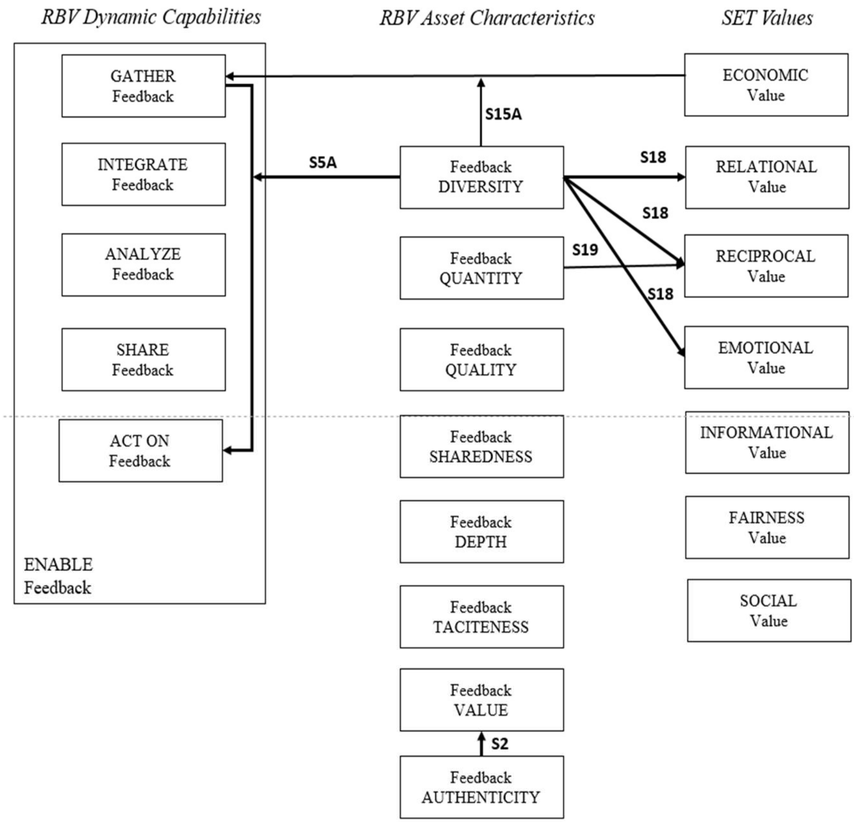

Figure 2: Summary of novelty propositions on interconnections between assets, dynamic capabilities and SET constructs, ***supplier view****. Source: Authors.*

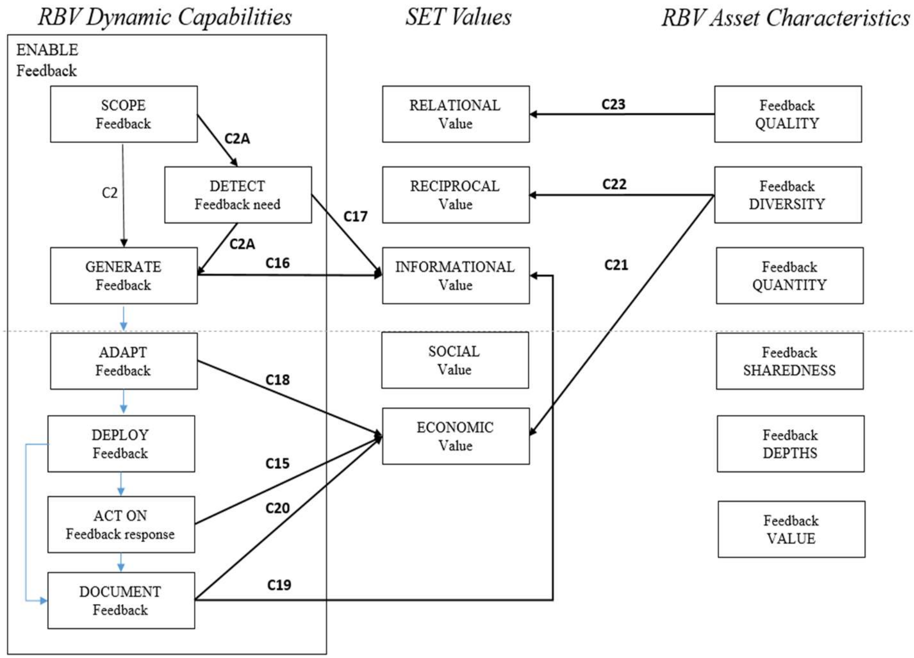

*Figure 3: Proposed connections between RBV dynamic capabilities, asset characteristics and SET values, **customer view**. Source: Authors*

Thesis 1. Feedback research is consumer-centric, methodologically narrow and theoretically concentrated, which leaves B2B feedback largely unexplained

Of the 73 reviewed articles, approximately 93% are situated in B2C contexts, and quantitative designs dominate. Theoretically the field rests on a small base: Social Exchange Theory, Customer Citizenship Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework account for the frameworks used most often.

The review also consolidates what the field knows: antecedents, mediators, and moderators cluster into personal, relational, process-related, and product-related groups, while outcomes cluster around brand-level effects, value-proposition outcomes, and process-related consequences. Because the underlying studies observe consumer settings, this map cannot be transferred to industrial markets, where dependency, formal procurement, and knowledge interdependence change how feedback is generated and used.

Thesis 2. In B2B relationships feedback functions as a bundle of asset characteristics, and authenticity is one of them

Suppliers do not treat incoming feedback as a single, undifferentiated signal. They evaluate it along distinguishable characteristics: value, depth, quantity, quality, sharedness, diversity, and tacitness. These properties determine whether feedback can be converted into learning and action, which places feedback within the Resource-Based View as an intangible asset rather than as a communication event.

The supplier data yielded an eighth characteristic that the literature does not treat as a property of feedback: authenticity, the degree to which feedback is truthful and aligned with the provider's intended position. The dataset was rich enough to develop a taxonomy ranging from candid, evidence-backed feedback through selective or politically filtered feedback to strategic misrepresentation.

Authenticity shapes how much of the received information a supplier is willing to act on.

Proposition S2. Feedback authenticity positively influences feedback value.

Thesis 3. Tacitness and authenticity are receiver-side perceptions: providers do not recognize them in their own feedback

The customer data mirrored the supplier findings for six of the eight characteristics. Two did not appear on the provider side at all: tacitness and authenticity.

This absence is a result rather than a gap in the data. Providers focus on conveying content, and the tacit components of their own knowledge feel self-evident to them, whereas receivers, who must decode and contextualize the input, encounter tacitness directly (Grant, 1996). Authenticity follows the same logic in reverse: it is inferred by the audience from contextual and relational cues rather than consciously produced. The two characteristics carrying the greatest interpretive weight for suppliers are thus invisible to the actors who generate them.

Thesis 4. Suppliers process feedback through a six-part dynamic capability system in which enablement is a distinct capability

On the receiving side, feedback is handled through repeatable routines rather than ad hoc reactions. Five correspond to capabilities established in the literature: gather, integrate, analyze, share, and act on feedback. The data revealed a sixth, enable, comprising the structures, routines, coordination mechanisms, and cultural norms that make the others operable at all. Enablement is conceptualized here as a dynamic capability (Teece, 2014) rather than as a context variable, because firms build and adjust it deliberately.

Thesis 5. Providing feedback is itself a capability system: customers scope, detect, generate, adapt, deploy, act on responses, document and enable

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Feedback provision is not a passive reaction to supplier requests. Customers deploy their own capability set, two elements of which have no counterpart in the supplier-side literature: scope, the capability to define the boundaries, focus, and depth of the feedback to be given, and detect, the capability to sense when feedback is needed (Figure 3).

Detection is operationally grounded: customers identify anomalies such as stock-outs, sales drops, or quality incidents and convert them into structured signals, while scoping determines which are worth raising with which partner. Supplier-side feedback quality is therefore partly produced upstream, by the customer's own routines.

Proposition C2. The stronger a customer's capability to detect feedback-relevant issues, the more effectively it can generate structured, evidence-based feedback.

Proposition C2A. Detection mediates the relationship between scoping and generation.

Propositions C15–C20. Acting on supplier responses and adapting feedback processes generate economic value through reduced operational friction and protected continuity, while generating, detecting, and documenting feedback generate informational value through the identification of hidden problems and through traceability and knowledge retention.

Thesis 6. Feedback generates several distinct types of value, and these are perceived asymmetrically by the two sides

Both sides attribute economic, relational, informational, social, and reciprocal value to feedback. Suppliers additionally report two value types customers do not recognize: emotional value and fairness value (Table 1).

The asymmetry is systematic. Suppliers are evaluated, depend on the relationship, and bear responsibility for implementing change, so feedback engages identity, justice, and affect for them in a way it does not for the party giving it (Blau, 1964, Molm, 1997). Customers correspondingly underestimate what their feedback sets in motion inside supplier organizations. Asymmetry is established in interorganizational research (Emerson, 1962), but had not been shown to operate on the value attributed to feedback itself.

Feedback Values	Supplier (feedback receiver)	Customer (feedback provider)
Economic	X	X
Relational	X	X
Informational	X	X
Social	X	X
Reciprocal	X	X
Emotional	X	
Fairness	X	

Table 1: Feedback values by appearance at suppliers and customers. Source: Author.

Thesis 7. Asset characteristics condition capability development and value creation, and value creation has boundary conditions

Feedback diversity emerged as the most consequential characteristic: it conditions how gathering translates into action and how economic value feeds back into gathering routines, and it raises several value dimensions at once. The analysis also identifies a limit: increasing the volume of solicited feedback does not increase reciprocity but beyond a point reduces it, because respondents experience repeated requests as disregard for their time. Value creation through feedback is therefore not monotonic.

Propositions S5A and S15A. Feedback diversity moderates the relationship between gather-feedback and act-on-feedback capability, and between the economic value of feedback and gathering capability.

Proposition S18. Feedback diversity positively influences the emotional, relational, and reciprocal value of feedback.

Proposition S19. Excessive feedback volume diminishes reciprocal engagement.

Propositions C21–C23. Diversity of feedback formats increases economic and reciprocal value, and higher feedback quality increases relational value by enhancing credibility and reducing ambiguity.

Thesis 8. In regulated markets, documentation and evidence are value-creating routines rather than administrative overhead

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Documentation obligations shape the feedback process throughout. Archived feedback, testing reports, and performance records serve compliance and audit readiness, so documentation produces economic value by reducing regulatory exposure and informational value by making feedback traceable and reusable as organizational memory.

Relatedly, verifiable, evidence-rich feedback supported by photographs, measurements, reports, or system data reduces ambiguity and stabilizes cooperation even when the message is critical. Communication-quality research treats such evidence as an attribute of the message; here it also operates as a relational asset, reinforcing relational value beyond its informational and economic effects.

Thesis 9. An integrated model: feedback as a capability system and value-creation process embedded in industrial relationships

The synthesis yields an integrated model (Figure 4). The process begins with customer-side input creation, where scoping, detecting, generating, adapting, acting, documenting, and enabling convert operational experience into actionable signals. Suppliers interpret those signals through their gather, integrate, analyze, share, enable, and act capabilities, assessing depth, diversity, tacitness, and authenticity under conditions of dependency and power asymmetry. Acting on feedback produces perceived values, which shapes how much further effort each party invests.

Throughout, the process is conditioned by five groups of drivers: asset characteristics, relational structures such as trust and dependency, process constraints such as documentation and regulation, role-based differences, and cognitive factors such as tacit knowledge and interpretive effort.

The central claim is conceptual: feedback in B2B markets is not a message travelling between two firms but a capability system, a resource configuration, and a value-creation mechanism embedded in an ongoing relationship. This reframing also opens two theoretical domains feedback research has not yet used: the Knowledge-Based View and Organizational Information Processing Theory.

These results extend the Resource-Based View and Social Exchange Theory to B2B feedback, introduce authenticity and enablement into the conceptual vocabulary of the field, and show that asymmetry is a fundamental rather than incidental property of feedback exchanges. Methodologically, the dual-perspective design and the theory-anchored third coding stage capture both sides of an exchange that qualitative research usually observes from one side only.

For practice, the findings translate into a coherent agenda: treat feedback as a strategic knowledge asset; build the capabilities that generate, absorb, and act on it; strengthen frontline detection; support claims with evidence and use multiple formats; formalize documentation as knowledge infrastructure; keep solicitation within the customer's scope and volume tolerance; and recognize the emotional and fairness consequences feedback carries for the receiving side. The propositions are analytically, not statistically, generalizable and now require quantitative validation through dyadic and longitudinal designs in other sectors.

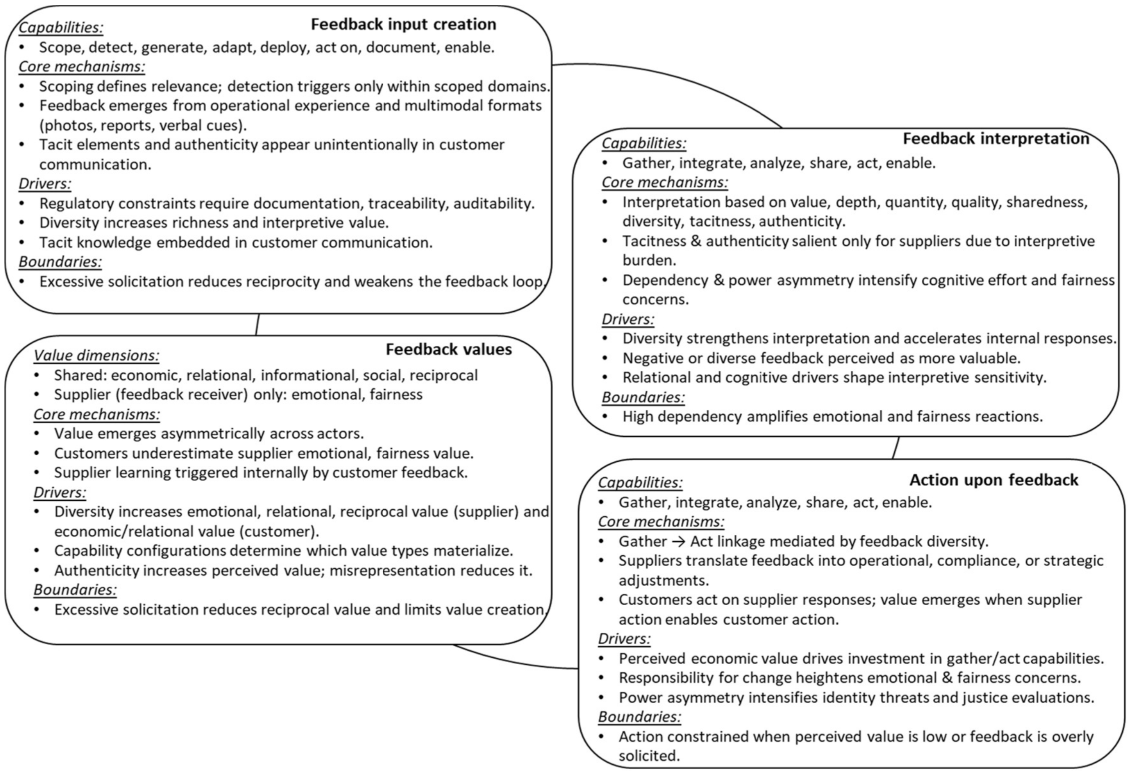

Figure 4: Integrated B2B feedback model. Source: Author

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V. Own and co-authored publications on the topic

Journal article

MOLNÁR, L., KESZEY, T. & FRAU, M. (2025): Developing a deeper understanding of actionable customer feedback: a systematic literature review. Society and Economy. Published online 26 February 2025. doi: 10.1556/204.2024.00011

Manuscripts intended for journal submission

MOLNÁR, L., KESZEY, T. & FRAU, M.: The strategic architecture of B2B feedback: a resource-based view of assets, dynamic capabilities and social exchange theory examination of healthcare market suppliers.

MOLNÁR, L., KESZEY, T. & FRAU, M.: Unpacking the B2B feedback process: customer-side insights into resource use and social exchange – a qualitative study in the medical trading sector.

The dissertation incorporates extended versions of these manuscripts. The author's contribution to all three was substantial, and the co-authors' declarations have been obtained.