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Correlates and Consequences of Feedback Orientation in Organizations

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Feedback orientation is an individual difference that involves seeing feedback as useful, feeling accountable to act on feedback, being aware of social information, and feeling self-assured when dealing with feedback. In this study, the authors present a test of a model of the feedback-seeking process that includes feedback orientation. They hypothesize that emotional intelligence and the organization's feedback environment are correlates of feedback orientation and that feedback orientation is indirectly related to task performance and leader-member exchange ratings made by the supervisor through increased feedback-seeking behavior. Results largely support the hypothesized model, demonstrating the importance of this construct for performance management research.

Keywords: *feedback-seeking behavior; performance management; employee development; feedback culture; emotional intelligence*

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More than 25 years of research on feedback-seeking behavior has shown that task-related feedback is an important individual and organizational resource that can help employees develop an accurate self-view, reach their performance goals, and improve their social standing and relationships (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Recently, a variety of new theoretical models on learning, development, and performance management in organizations has highlighted the importance of a construct called *feedback orientation* (e.g., Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008; London & Maurer, 2004; London & Smither, 2002). Feedback orientation, globally defined by London and Smither as a person's overall receptivity to feedback, has been proposed to directly shape the way that employees seek, receive, interpret, and use feedback information and indirectly shape the performance outcomes that managers hope to bring about when they provide feedback. Consequently, feedback orientation is thought to be an important piece of the broader performance management process, but very little empirical research exists to support these propositions.

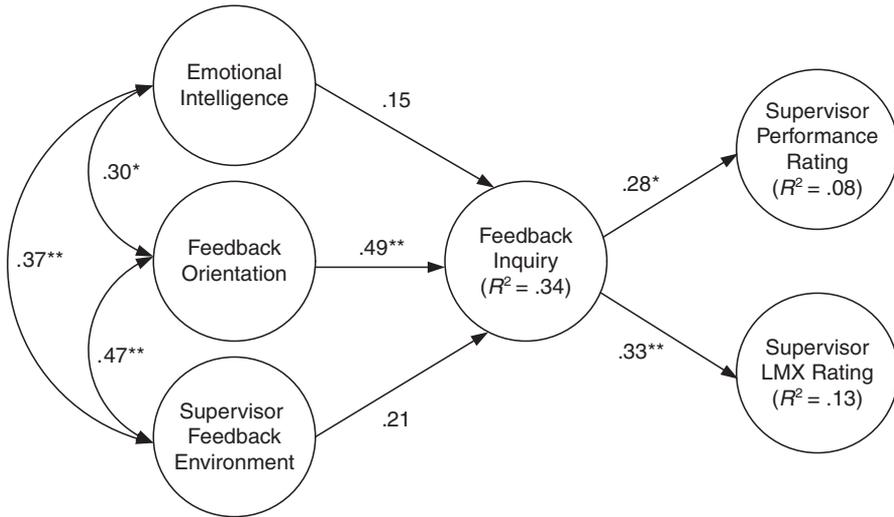
We address this gap in the literature by developing and testing a model of feedback orientation and performance (see Figure 1). We adopt London and Smither's (2002) perspective that feedback orientation is related to a combination of individual differences and environmental perceptions. Consequently, we expect that emotional intelligence and the quality of the organization's feedback culture are important correlates of feedback orientation. Further, we hypothesize that feedback orientation is directly related to active feedback-seeking behavior and indirectly related to task performance and leader-member exchange (LMX) between the subordinate employee and his or her supervisor. Our study therefore advances the literature on feedback-seeking behavior by identifying key correlates of feedback orientation and providing empirical evidence that feedback orientation predicts important outcomes consistent with existing theory.

Feedback Orientation and Performance Management

Feedback orientation is typically portrayed as a multidimensional construct (London, 2002, 2003; London & Maurer, 2004; London & Smither, 2002; Sessa & London, 2006). The key components of feedback orientation identified in the literature include (1) a positive view of feedback and lack of apprehension toward it, (2) a cognitive tendency to process feedback mindfully, (3) an awareness of others' view of oneself, (4) a belief that feedback is valuable, and (5) a sense of accountability to act on feedback (London & Smither, 2002). London and Smither's theoretical model of the performance management process proposed that feedback orientation has an effect on each stage of the feedback process. Specifically, employees with a high feedback orientation should be better able to control and overcome their emotional reactions to feedback (the *receiving* stage), should process feedback more meaningfully and overcome attribution errors (the *processing* stage), and should successfully apply feedback to set goals and improve performance (the *use* stage). Feedback orientation is therefore thought to be important because it affects each of these stages in which performance feedback could otherwise be rationalized away, misconstrued, or ineffectively put into practice.

London and Smither (2002) also emphasized that experiences with feedback can change one's feedback orientation over moderate periods of time (e.g., 6-12 months), and they

Figure 1
Structural Model Including Standardized Path Coefficients



Note: LMX = leader-member exchange.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

suggested that managers can work to develop a high feedback orientation among their subordinates. Consequently, feedback orientation is perhaps best conceptualized as a quasi-trait, an individual difference that remains stable over moderate periods but that can be shaped by strong, consistent situational influences (Deshon & Gillespie, 2005).

Despite considerable theorizing, empirical research on feedback orientation remains quite limited to date. The only existing measure of feedback orientation, the Feedback Orientation Scale, was developed by Linderbaum and Levy (2010). Linderbaum and Levy refined the scale over two pilot studies and presented evidence of its reliability and validity using samples of employed undergraduate students and adults working full-time in a manufacturing setting. Their results indicated that feedback orientation exhibited modest, positive relationships with related individual differences such as learning goal orientation, Protestant work ethic, general self-efficacy, and positive affect. Further, it was predictive of outcomes such as self-reported job involvement, role clarity, performance appraisal session satisfaction, feedback environment perceptions, and feedback-seeking behavior. Additional research has documented that feedback orientation is also related to constructs such as promotion regulatory focus and perceived organizational support (Gregory & Levy, 2008). Taken together, these studies built a nomological network for the feedback orientation construct, but further research is needed to test the effects of feedback orientation on how employees seek and use feedback.

Many authors have proposed that feedback orientation is an important predictor of criteria such as training success, employee development, and maintaining high performance

standards (e.g., Gregory & Levy, 2008; Linderbaum & Levy, 2007; London, 2003; London & Smither, 2002). For example, at the individual level of analysis, Herold and Fedor (2003) proposed that trainees with a positive orientation toward feedback would have an advantage in training contexts when they must learn novel tasks and cannot rely on their internal judgments. Feedback orientation is also thought to have important implications for how leaders seek and respond to developmental feedback (London, 2002; London & Maurer, 2004), particularly within executive coaching relationships (Gregory et al., 2008) and multisource feedback systems (Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005). At the organizational level of analysis, a favorable feedback orientation has also been submitted as a characteristic of continuous learners that contributes to the development and maintenance of a successful learning culture (Sessa & London, 2006). However, all of these propositions regarding feedback orientation's relationships with learning and performance remain untested.

We advance research on feedback orientation in this study by presenting an examination of feedback orientation in a broader model of feedback-seeking behavior and performance. Specifically, we test several hypotheses concerning correlates of feedback orientation (emotional intelligence and feedback environment perceptions) and control for their effects when testing the relationship between feedback orientation and feedback-seeking behavior. We also demonstrate that feedback orientation has indirect effects on supervisor-rated task performance and LMX perceptions through enhanced feedback seeking. Our study therefore contributes to the literature on feedback orientation by identifying a mechanism through which employees with higher feedback orientation attain better performance ratings and higher quality relationships with their supervisors.

Correlates of Feedback Orientation

London and Smither (2002) noted that feedback orientation should be related to both key individual differences and aspects of the organizational context. They proposed that traits such as self-monitoring, openness to experience, and mastery goal orientation should be predictive of feedback orientation, and some support for these expectations has been found in previous research (Linderbaum & Levy, 2007, 2010). In this study, we extend London and Smither's model to test the relationship between emotional intelligence and feedback orientation. We focused on emotional intelligence, due to several points of theoretical convergence between feedback orientation, emotional intelligence, and feedback-seeking behavior that we discuss in greater detail below.

Although the construct definition of emotional intelligence is debated (e.g., Landy, 2005), most perspectives on emotional intelligence highlight a common core of abilities held by emotionally intelligent individuals (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Daus, 2009; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Specifically, people with high emotional intelligence are proposed to be (1) aware of their own emotional feelings and expressions, (2) able to appraise and understand others' emotions, (3) capable of controlling and regulating their own emotions, and (4) able to use emotions to facilitate performance. Emotional intelligence has been linked to a wide variety of organizational behaviors, such as performance, leadership, career success, conflict management, and prosocial behavior

(Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Ascough, 2007; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Ashton-James, 2006; Jordan et al., 2009; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). However, feedback researchers have noted that the role of emotional intelligence in the feedback-seeking process remains an important, unexplored direction for further study (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003).

There are several reasons why emotional intelligence and feedback orientation should be related. First, people with high emotional intelligence have an accurate self-perception. They understand their own feelings, what triggers them, and how to use them to manage goal attainment (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Similarly, employees with a strong feedback orientation are proposed to be self-aware, open to introspection, interested in learning about themselves, and willing to follow through on feedback to improve their performance (Linderbaum & Levy, 2007; London, 2003; London & Smither, 2002). Thus, one important connection between emotional intelligence and feedback orientation is the common quality of accurately understanding the self and using this self-relevant information to achieve instrumental goals. We expect that emotionally intelligent employees are likely to also possess a high feedback orientation because of this desire to maintain accurate self-awareness.

A second connection between these constructs is their shared emphasis on being aware of social information external to the self. People with high emotional intelligence can accurately read the emotions of others and have a good sense of how others feel about them (e.g., Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000). Likewise, London (2003) suggested that employees with a strong feedback orientation are sensitive to how others feel about them and can use these insights to become more effective workers. Thus, emotionally intelligent employees are also likely to possess a high feedback orientation because of their sensitivity to others' emotional cues and ability to use social information to improve performance.

Taken in sum, we expect that emotional intelligence and feedback orientation will be positively related because both constructs involve the ability to recognize the social cues that signal goal–performance discrepancies, to determine good targets and timing for feedback seeking (Ashford et al., 2003), and to maintain self-awareness that allows one to use feedback effectively.

Hypothesis 1: Emotional intelligence will be positively related to feedback orientation.

London and Smither (2002) also proposed that feedback orientation should be related to the extent to which the organizational culture is supportive of feedback seeking on an informal, day-to-day basis. Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004) described this aspect of the culture as the organizational feedback environment. The feedback environment is characterized by seven aspects of the organizational context, which include (1) the perceived credibility of the feedback source, (2) the quality of feedback that is available, (3) the tactfulness with which feedback is delivered, (4) the extent to which favorable feedback can be received, (5) the extent to which unfavorable feedback can be received, (6) the accessibility or availability of feedback, and (7) the extent to which feedback-seeking behavior is supported and encouraged.

London and Smither (2002) proposed that feedback culture and feedback orientation should be positively related because a supportive culture improves the likelihood that feedback will be accepted, and it communicates that learning and development are supported in the organization. As explained by Steelman et al. (2004), a supportive feedback environment

is one in which high-quality feedback is delivered in a tactful and constructive manner. In such a context, feedback can help employees feel more confident in their ability to address goal–performance discrepancies and attain desired outcomes, which is likely to result in a positive relationship between feedback environment perceptions and feedback orientation. Support for this relationship has been found in preliminary validation research on the Feedback Orientation Scale, with some initial research documenting a positive relationship between feedback environment perceptions and feedback orientation (Gregory & Levy, 2008; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). Taken in sum, we expect that employees who perceive a supportive feedback environment will also report a favorable feedback orientation.

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of the feedback environment will be positively related to feedback orientation.

Outcomes of Feedback Orientation

As shown in Figure 1, we expect that feedback orientation will be predictive of several criteria reported by supervisors, namely, task performance and LMX. However, we hypothesize that these proposed relationships between feedback orientation and criteria are mediated by feedback-seeking behavior. As London and colleagues have described, employees with a high feedback orientation are likely to be invested in frequently seeking feedback to maintain high performance standards (London, 2002, 2003; London & Maurer, 2004; Sessa & London, 2006). The most immediate outcome of a high feedback orientation should therefore be greater feedback-seeking behavior.

Consistent with Ashford and Cummings (1983), we draw a distinction between two methods of feedback seeking: feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring. Inquiry involves actively seeking feedback from others, whereas monitoring involves passive scanning of the work environment for information. Although inquiry is the more personally risky form of behavior because it involves exposing oneself to the judgments of others, inquiry also has the greater potential to yield more useful, specific performance feedback that can be used for goal attainment (Ashford et al., 2003). We accordingly focus on inquiry in this study and expect that employees with a better feedback orientation will engage in more feedback seeking through inquiry. Some support for this expectation was found by Linderbaum and Levy (2010), who reported that feedback orientation was positively related to active inquiry.

We expect to replicate this relationship and build on Linderbaum and Levy's (2010) findings by showing that feedback orientation relates to feedback inquiry when controlling for the effects of emotional intelligence and feedback environment perceptions. Past research has established that feedback environment perceptions are predictive of feedback-seeking behavior (Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007). Ashford et al. (2003) suggested that emotional intelligence should also be related to feedback-seeking behavior because seeking feedback is an important way to attain and maintain accurate self-awareness. In sum, because we expect that emotional intelligence and feedback environment perceptions will be related to both feedback orientation and feedback inquiry, it is important to control for the effects of these correlates when testing the relationship between feedback orientation and feedback-seeking behavior.

Hypothesis 3: When controlling for the effects of feedback environment perceptions and emotional intelligence, feedback orientation will have a positive effect on feedback inquiry.

As shown in Figure 1, we expect that inquiry mediates the relationship between feedback orientation and task performance. Feedback seeking should enhance task performance by giving employees the ability to monitor and evaluate their work, address goal–performance discrepancies prior to formal performance appraisals, and set appropriate performance goals (Ashford et al., 2003). Consistent with these ideas, several researchers have shown that feedback-seeking behavior is positively related to task performance (e.g., Morrison, 1993; Renn & Fedor, 2001; Whitaker et al., 2007).

We also expect that inquiry mediates the relationship between feedback orientation and LMX, which refers to the quality of the unique exchange relationship that develops between a supervisor and subordinate (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). As Lam, Huang, and Snape (2007) explained, inquiry should contribute to high-quality LMX relationships because feedback seeking helps the subordinate and supervisor to clearly define their roles and expectations for each other. This role-making process results in a stable, trusting relationship in which both parties understand each other's needs and expectations (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Further, Lam et al. pointed out that feedback-seeking behavior creates a good impression with supervisors because it communicates that the subordinate is invested in improving his or her performance. Thus, the supervisor comes to like the subordinate more because of both the clear, trusting relationship that develops and the initiative demonstrated by the subordinate. Consequently, inquiry has the potential to improve both task performance and the quality of social relationships, which suggests that it is a likely mediating mechanism to convey the effects of feedback orientation on these criteria.

To summarize, we expect that the mechanism through which feedback orientation influences task performance and LMX is feedback inquiry, and we accordingly pose the following mediation hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Feedback inquiry will mediate the relationship between feedback orientation and supervisory task performance ratings, yielding a positive, indirect relationship.

Hypothesis 5: Feedback inquiry will mediate the relationship between feedback orientation and supervisory LMX ratings, yielding a positive, indirect relationship.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Our participants were 147 employed undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses at a college in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. All participants completed the study in exchange for voluntary course credit. Each participant first completed a self-report survey measuring emotional intelligence, perceptions of the feedback environment, feedback orientation, and feedback inquiry in small-group settings. After finishing the survey, the participant was given a postage-paid envelope containing a survey for his or her supervisor, who subsequently reported task performance ratings and perceptions of LMX quality for the

subordinate. Supervisor surveys were returned to us through the mail; both the subordinate and supervisor remained blind to each other's responses. We received 126 matched supervisor responses, yielding an 85.7% response rate.

The subordinate sample contained both traditional and nontraditional students. The average organizational tenure was 21.63 months, and the participants worked an average of 19.4 hours per week (range of 10-45 hours). Their mean age was 21.75 years. The sample was 78.1% female and reported considerable racial and ethnic diversity; participants were 59.6% Caucasian, 16.4% African American, 6.8% Latino/Latina, 7.5% Asian American, 4.8% Pacific Islander, and 4.8% who identified as some other race or ethnicity. Some representative job titles of the subordinate employees included computer repair technician, receptionist, server, sales associate, medical assistant, and teacher.

The supervisors in the sample reported a mean age of 36.56 years, a mean tenure of 7.75 years with their organizations, and a mean of 17.80 months supervising the subordinate participants. This sample was 58.9% female and 81.3% Caucasian, 3.1% African American, 7.0% Latino/Latina, 3.9% Asian American, and 4.7% who identified as some other race or ethnicity. Job titles reported by the supervisors included nurse manager, president, store manager, and principal.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Subordinate measures. Emotional intelligence was measured with the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002). This 16-item measure ($\alpha = .88$) measures four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-emotions appraisal, others' emotions appraisal, use of emotions, and regulation of emotions. Sample items from each dimension, respectively, include "I really understand what I feel," "I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others," "I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them," and "I am quite capable of handling my own emotions."

The feedback environment was measured with the short form of the Supervisor Feedback Environment Scale (Rosen, 2006; Steelman et al., 2004). The 21-item scale ($\alpha = .91$) measures seven dimensions of the feedback environment, namely, source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, providing favorable feedback, providing unfavorable feedback, source availability, and promoting feedback seeking. Sample items include "I have confidence in the feedback my supervisor gives me" (source credibility) and "My supervisor is tactful when giving me performance feedback" (feedback delivery). Although a parallel measure was developed by Steelman et al. to assess the coworker feedback environment, we focused exclusively on the supervisor feedback environment because our criterion ratings were made by supervisors.

Feedback orientation was measured with the Feedback Orientation Scale, a 20-item scale ($\alpha = .87$) developed by Linderbaum and Levy (2010). The scale is based on London and Smither's (2002) construct definition and organizes the components of feedback orientation

into four dimensions, namely, perceived utility of feedback, accountability to use feedback, social awareness, and self-efficacy about dealing with feedback. Sample items from these four dimensions, respectively, include “Feedback contributes to my success at work,” “It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance,” “Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others,” and “I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback.” Although this is a new scale, validity evidence has been reported by Linderbaum and Levy (2010) and by Gregory and Levy (2008).

Feedback inquiry was measured with a seven-item scale ($\alpha = .81$) made by combining a four-item measure reported by Ashford and Black (1996) with a three-item measure reported by Williams and Johnson (2000). Sample items include “Sought out feedback on your performance during your assignments” and “Asked your boss for information about what is required for you to function successfully on the job.” Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*).

Supervisor measures. Leader–member exchange was measured using the LMX-7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The LMX-7 is written from the perspective of the subordinate, so we followed the common practice of providing the supervisor with mirrored versions of the items ($\alpha = .85$) that instead assessed the quality of the relationship from the supervisor’s perspective (e.g., Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Sample items include “This subordinate understands my job problems and needs” and “This subordinate helps me solve problems with my work.”

Task performance was measured using a four-item scale ($\alpha = .78$) adapted from Alper, Tjosvold, and Law (2000). Sample items include “The level of initiative displayed by this employee is . . .” and “The quantity of work output created by this employee is . . .” Responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*).

Results

Measurement Model

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations of scale scores. As shown in this table, few demographic variables were related to endogenous variables in the model. However, because subordinate age was positively related to LMX ratings, we controlled for the effects of age on LMX ratings in our model tests. No other demographic variables were included in the model.

Because our constructs were all measured with survey instruments, we began by testing the possibility that common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) may have influenced the magnitude of the relationships we observed. Consistent with the options for evaluating CMV presented by Podsakoff et al., we conducted single-method-factor tests for the effects of CMV among the subordinate-reported variables (feedback orientation, feedback environment, emotional intelligence, and inquiry) and the supervisor-reported variables (LMX and task performance). With respect to the subordinate measures, we first ran a measurement model without the inclusion of a latent methods factor, $\chi^2_{(183)} = 333.67, p < .001$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .86, root mean square error

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations
Between Overall Scale Scores

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Emotional intelligence	3.96	0.49	.88										
2. Feedback environment	3.91	0.52	.42**	.91									
3. Feedback orientation	3.60	0.42	.32**	.37**	.87								
4. Feedback inquiry	2.79	0.69	.11	.44**	.39**	.81							
5. Task performance	4.32	0.53	.05	.23*	.16 [†]	.22*	.78						
6. Leader-member exchange	4.16	0.52	.09	.33**	.15 [†]	.26**	.67**	.85					
7. Gender	—	—	.08	-.04	-.05	-.13	-.02	-.08	—				
8. Age	21.75	16.95	-.21*	-.01	-.05	.04	.10	.18*	.04	—			
9. Race	—	—	.00	.05	.03	-.03	-.01	-.01	-.14	-.05	—		
10. Job type	—	—	.01	.04	-.03	.09	.11	.12	.11	-.06	.05	—	
11. Tenure (months)	21.63	33.94	.01	.01	-.06	-.07	.01	.17	.03	-.01	.05	.20*	—

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .08. We then modified the measurement model to add a latent methods factor on which all indicators were set to have an equivalent loading to prevent the model from being underidentified, $\chi^2_{(181)} = 330.33$, $p < .001$; CFI = .86, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .08. A chi-square difference test shows that the model fit was not significantly improved based on the addition of the latent common method factor, $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 3.34$, $p > .05$, suggesting that the common measurement method did not distort our findings. We found similar results when evaluating the supervisor-reported variables. The fits for the measurement model, $\chi^2_{(42)} = 78.31$, $p < .001$; CFI = .94, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .05, and the measurement model with a latent methods factor, $\chi^2_{(40)} = 76.82$, $p < .001$; CFI = .94, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .05, were quite similar. Again, a chi-square difference test showed that the model fit was not significantly improved based on the addition of the latent common method factor, $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 1.49$, $p > .05$. Consequently, we concluded that CMV was not a source of bias in our results.

Our next step was to test the measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis following the procedures recommended by Kline (2005). Emotional intelligence was indicated by four parcels created by calculating the scale scores associated with each of the four a priori dimensions measured by the scale (Hall, Snell, & Foust, 1999). We followed the same practice to create seven parceled indicators of the supervisor feedback environment and four parceled indicators of feedback orientation. The unidimensional feedback inquiry, task performance, and LMX scales were indicated by their individual items. Age was treated as a latent variable indicated by a single item (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Using the various

guidelines for evaluating model fit that have been proposed by Browne and Cudeck (1993), Hu and Bentler (1999), and Kline (2005), we concluded that our measurement model had an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2_{(474)} = 661.87, p < .001$; CFI = .89, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .86, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07.

Before proceeding to a test of our structural model, we compared our hypothesized measurement model to an alternative measurement model in which all of the feedback-related constructs (feedback orientation, feedback environment perceptions, and feedback inquiry) served as indicators of a global feedback construct. Such a model posits that these feedback-related variables are not discriminant from each other. Overall, this alternative model exhibited very poor fit to the data, $\chi^2_{(485)} = 903.31, p < .001$; CFI = .71, TLI = .69, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .10. Given that the hypothesized measurement model fit much better, $\Delta\chi^2_{(11)} = 241.44, p < .001$, we concluded that the feedback constructs were indeed discriminant and advanced to testing the structural model.

Structural Model

The results of the structural model are depicted in Figure 1, which also demonstrated acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2_{(482)} = 677.33, p < .001$; CFI = .89, TLI = .86, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .09. A chi-square difference test indicates that the structural model did not exhibit significantly worse fit to the data than the hypothesized measurement model, providing support for the more parsimonious structural model, $\Delta\chi^2_{(8)} = 15.46, p > .05$.

We next compared our structural model to an alternative model (Kline, 2005). Our hypothesized structural model placed LMX as an outcome of the feedback-seeking process, consistent with the perspective of Lam et al. (2007) that feedback-seeking behavior helps to establish the supervisor and subordinate roles. However, other authors have modeled LMX as an antecedent of the feedback-seeking process (e.g., Chen, Lam, & Zhong, 2007; Lee, Park, Lee, & Lee, 2007), reasoning that subordinates are more comfortable with seeking feedback when it comes from leaders with whom they have a good relationship. Thus, our alternative model closely followed the structural model depicted in Figure 1, except that LMX was modeled as a fourth antecedent of inquiry instead of an outcome of inquiry. Overall, this alternative model did not fit the data as well as the hypothesized structural model, $\chi^2_{(482)} = 685.06, p < .001$; CFI = .86, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .11. The hypothesized structural model with LMX as an outcome of inquiry, rather than an antecedent of feedback orientation, displayed better fit to the data.

Tests of Hypotheses

We evaluated our hypotheses with respect to the structural equation model path coefficients reported in Figure 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that emotional intelligence would be positively related to feedback orientation, and Hypothesis 2 predicted that the supervisor feedback environment perceptions would be positively related to feedback orientation. As shown in Figure 1, both hypotheses were supported with moderate, positive relationships.

In Hypothesis 3, we predicted that feedback orientation would have a significant direct effect on inquiry when controlling for the effects of feedback environment perceptions and emotional intelligence. This hypothesis was also supported; although Table 1 shows that both feedback environment perceptions and feedback orientation were correlated with inquiry, when inquiry was regressed on all three predictors only feedback orientation retained a significant effect ($\beta = .49, p < .01$). We also hypothesized indirect effects of feedback orientation on supervisor ratings of task performance in Hypothesis 4 and on LMX in Hypothesis 5. We found that inquiry was positively related to both performance ($\beta = .28, p < .05$) and LMX ratings ($\beta = .33, p < .01$). A Sobel test indicated that the indirect effect of feedback orientation on performance via inquiry was significant in support of Hypothesis 4 ($\alpha\beta = .14, p < .05$). Similarly, the indirect effect of feedback orientation on LMX via inquiry was also significant in support of Hypothesis 5 ($\alpha\beta = .16, p < .05$). Our results therefore demonstrate that feedback orientation has proximal effects on feedback inquiry and distal effects on supervisor ratings of important criteria.

Discussion

Feedback orientation is an important quasi-trait that has the potential to affect the performance management process in many respects. To date, research on feedback orientation has consisted of theoretical propositions or scale development and validation studies (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010; London, 2003; London & Smither, 2002). In contrast, our empirical study highlights the important place that feedback orientation has in the feedback-seeking process and demonstrates its relevance for organizational researchers and managers.

Consistent with London and Smither's (2002) theoretical model, we found support for the proposition that feedback orientation is related to environmental perceptions and individual differences. Specifically, we found that both emotional intelligence and perceptions of the supervisor feedback environment had positive, moderate relationships with feedback orientation. These findings further elaborate the traits and situational conditions that contribute to the development of a high feedback orientation. Further, we found that feedback orientation had a significant effect on inquiry when controlling for these variables. In fact, the bivariate relationship between feedback environment perceptions and feedback inquiry became nonsignificant when feedback orientation was included in the structural model, as shown in Figure 1.

Our findings are also noteworthy because we responded to Ashford et al.'s (2003) call to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the feedback-seeking process. Despite some areas of conceptual overlap, we demonstrated that feedback orientation was only moderately related to emotional intelligence. Further, self-reported emotional intelligence was not significantly related to feedback inquiry. Future research using a performance-based measure of emotional intelligence, such as the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003), may help shed further light on the relationships between emotional intelligence, feedback orientation, and feedback inquiry.

Lastly, we demonstrated that feedback orientation is related to important criteria through enhanced feedback inquiry. As Ashford et al. (2003) summarized in their review, feedback-seeking behavior has considerable potential to yield performance improvements, enhanced

role clarity, and a positive public image. Our findings show that feedback orientation has a strong, direct effect on feedback-seeking behavior and indirect effects on supervisor ratings of performance and LMX, providing the first empirical support for London and Smither's (2002) assertion that feedback orientation plays an important role in the performance management process. Managers who work to improve feedback orientation are likely to benefit from more active inquiry in uncertain situations, better performance, and improved relationships with their subordinates.

Implications for Research and Practice

The relationship that we found between feedback environment perceptions and feedback orientation has clear implications for practice. Consistent with London and Smither's (2002) theory, employees seem likely to develop a positive orientation toward feedback and development based on the supportiveness of the feedback environment set by their supervisors. Our findings indicate that supervisors should strive to be accessible; to encourage feedback-seeking behavior; and to try to consistently provide credible, tactful, and high-quality feedback to their subordinates. Because feedback orientation is a malleable quality over moderate periods of time (e.g., 6-12 months), it seems likely that employees with a poor orientation toward feedback could become more receptive to it provided that the feedback context is improved. Future research should build on our findings to examine the extent to which a supportive coworker feedback environment (Steelman et al., 2004) further contributes to a high feedback orientation.

Although we found that emotional intelligence is related to feedback orientation, more research is needed to identify other individual differences that are good predictors of a high feedback orientation. Some preliminary validation evidence for the Feedback Orientation Scale indicates that feedback orientation is positively correlated with individual differences such as learning goal orientation, positive affect, and promotion regulatory focus, and negatively correlated with traits such as external locus of control (Gregory & Levy, 2008; Linderbaum & Levy, 2007). However, further research is needed to elaborate on these findings by testing them in broader models that also control for the effects of the organizational context, as we did in this study by including feedback environment perceptions.

Further research is also needed to explore how feedback orientation shapes LMX in a longitudinal sense. According to Graen and Scandura (1987), LMX develops in three basic stages: *role taking*, in which the employee assumes the subordinate role; *role making*, in which trust between the supervisor and subordinate is built on the basis of initial exchanges of dedication, loyalty, and resources; and *role routinization*, in which the social exchange relationship solidifies. Feedback orientation should play an important role in the role-making process that contributes to high-quality LMX relationships. Employees with a high feedback orientation pay attention to the feedback they receive from their supervisors and try their best to act on it in a constructive and responsible fashion (London & Smither, 2002). We submit that this willingness to process feedback mindfully, change behaviors, and develop oneself communicates to supervisors that employees with a high feedback orientation are responsive and invested in improving performance. Consistent with social exchange theory,

supervisors are likely to respond to this demonstrated dedication with reciprocated trust, liking, and the establishment of a firm transactional relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Future research could examine in greater detail how feedback orientation contributes to the development of high-quality relationships during these stages over time.

More research is also needed to test moderators of the observed relationships. For example, feedback orientation and feedback-seeking behavior may have stronger effects on performance for employees in very complex or uncertain jobs. Being receptive to feedback and using feedback information effectively to adjust goals and behaviors would be especially important in these types of challenging positions. We also suggest that a high feedback orientation may be a more valuable characteristic for newer or inexperienced employees. Many of the proposed benefits of feedback orientation concern advantages in training contexts (e.g., Herold & Fedor, 2003) and learning environments (Sessa & London, 2006) that may be especially critical to improving performance when employees are new to a role.

Limitations

One strength of our study is that our organizational criteria were reported by a supervisor rather than the subordinate participant. However, our feedback constructs (feedback environment, orientation, and inquiry) were all self-reported. Although we tested for the potential effects of common method bias in our measurement model, our results could be strengthened by including a behavioral or other-rated measure of feedback inquiry.

A second limitation of our study is that our data are cross-sectional. London and Smither (2002) suggested that feedback orientation is malleable over moderate periods of time. This proposition implies that improvements in feedback orientation should lead to greater inquiry, and subsequently increased performance and LMX. Further research using repeated measures and a longitudinal design is necessary to confirm this process.

Conclusion

Feedback orientation remains an important but largely unexplored construct in the performance management literature. Despite considerable theoretical interest in its effects on learning and development, virtually no empirical research has tested its relationships with organizational outcomes. Our study is therefore an important first step in developing a better understanding of how a high feedback orientation can be developed and leveraged in the workplace.

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