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Analysis

The Impact of an Assigned performance Goal on 'Feedback Seeking Behaviour', *Human Performance*

Joshua O. Miluwi[1]
Ms. Hina Rashid[2]

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop and test a model of the relationship between supervisory reports of subordinate feedback-seeking behavior and subordinate reports of job satisfaction. Specifically, we applied literature on feedback seeking and socialization to demonstrate that this relationship is mediated by role clarity. Further, we found that the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and role clarity is moderated by social skill, implying that subordinates with greater social skill are better able to perceive, interpret, and apply feedback information to enhance role clarity. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

[1] Associate Professor, Commerce & Management, Career College, and Visiting faculty Career institute of international management Barkatullah University Bhopal, M.P.
Email- **drbobjoshuamlw7@gmail.com**, **drjoshuaom3@gmail.com**

[2] Department of Social Sciences,

Saifia College, Barkatullah University Bhopal

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Introduction

The rapid rate at which organizations undergo change has led to an increased emphasis on employee self-development and continuous learning (London & Smither 2002). As employees adapt to a constantly changing work environment, feedback becomes an increasingly salient means of guiding, motivating, and reinforcing effective behaviors while reducing detrimental behaviors. *Feedback* is defined as information that conveys an evaluation about the quality of an employee's performance (London & Smither 2002). This obtained information can, in turn, be used to regulate or improve future performance and may also serve a motivational function when it provides information about outcomes associated with work behavior. The success of organizations today, depends on employees' continuously improving their work performances (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Employees may want to gauge their work performance by taking the initiative to seek feedback from their supervisors (Ashford, 1986; Ashford, Blatt, & Vande Walle, 2003). It is generally believed that subordinates' feedback seeking facilitates the establishment of good working relationships with supervisors (London, 2003), because it helps clarify expectations (Morrison, 1993; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000) and creates a good impression (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Edwards, 1995). However, previous studies have suggested that the proactive behavior of subordinates may not necessarily help build better working relationships with supervisors and may even have a negative impact on these relationships (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002). For example, Allen and Rush (1998) and

Johnson et al. (2002) reported that if supervisors attributed subordinates' proactive helping behavior to altruistic motives, they tended to give better rewards to those subordinates. In contrast, if supervisors attributed such proactive helping behavior to impression management motives, they were likely to give their employees negative performance evaluations. These findings suggest that how supervisors respond to subordinates' proactive behavior depends on how they interpret the motivation for their behavior. As such, researchers and practitioners have come to recognize the value of feedback seeking in relation to important outcomes (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor 1979).

Review of Literature

Many researchers have demonstrated that proactive *feedback seeking*, the efforts made by employees to reduce uncertainty surrounding the acceptability of their performance (Ashford, 1986), is both an important individual and organizational resource (Ashford & Cummings 1983). At an organizational level, these outcomes include job satisfaction, employee learning and development, motivation, and job performance (Abraham, Morrison & Burnett 2006; Hackman & Oldham 1976; Lam, Huang & Snape 2007; Lee, Park, Lee & Lee 2007; Mignerey, Rubin & Gorden 1995; Morrison, 1993; Murphy & Cleveland 1995; Renn & Fedor 2001; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Meuller 2000; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy 2007). At the individual level, feedback seeking is related to the reduction of uncertainty regarding important work behaviors (Williams & Johnson 2000) and goal attainment (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle 2003; Morrison & Weldon 1990).

Because feedback-seeking behavior yields many beneficial outcomes for employees, it is not surprising that several researchers have found that feedback seeking relates positively to job satisfaction (e.g., Mignerey et al. 1995; Morrison 1993; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller 2000). However, despite recent calls for researchers to assess the indirect mechanisms through which feedback influences the attainment of instrumental outcomes (Anseel, Lievens & Levy 2007; Ashford et al., 2003), little research has considered the indirect routes through which feedback seeking influences satisfaction. Some early research on feedback seeking and socialization suggests that the key mediating variable may be a sense of control or understanding of the situation that derives from information garnered through feedback seeking (Louis, Posner & Powell 1983). We believe this sense of understanding is best captured by *role clarity*, the extent to which procedures, goals, criteria, and knowledge of consequences are well-understood (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman 1970). Thus, the first purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and job satisfaction is mediated by role clarity.

However, the extent to which feedback seeking yields useful information that is understood and applied to increase role clarity is partially dependent on characteristics of the feedback seeker. One individual difference that could influence the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and role clarity is the *social skill* of the feedback seeker, the extent to which the seeker can read, understand, and control social interactions (Hogan & Shelton 1998; Witt & Ferris 2003). Therefore, a second purpose of this study is to test our expectation that feedback seekers with high social skills should have a greater ability to perceive

meaning in feedback information that heightens their sense of role clarity. Feedback seeking is a type of proactive behavior (Crant, 2000). Researchers have suggested that two separate kinds of motives may be associated with feedback seeking: *performance-related motives* and *impression management motives* (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Morrison & Bies, 1991). Ashford and Cummings (1983) argued that performance-related motives involve a rational desire to obtain useful information in order to accomplish tasks effectively and enhance performance. This kind of motive includes an important element: information gathering about one's work role (Ashford et al., 2003; Crant, 2000). Impression management motives refer to the desire to control how one appears to others. Where supervisors attribute feedback seeking to performance-related motives, such behavior is likely to positively influence performance judgments, whereas behaviors attributed to impression management motives may be devalued or discounted (Eastman, 1994; Schlenker, 1980).

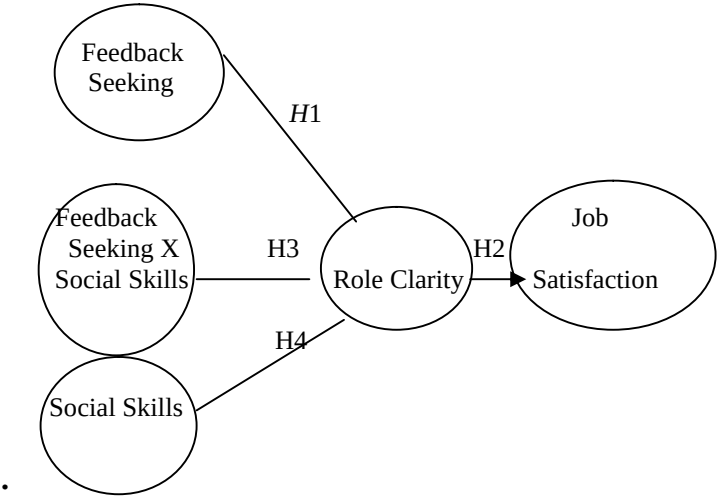
Research Objectives

To investigate how supervisors' interpretations of what motivates their subordinates' feedback-seeking behavior in both the quality of leader-member exchange and subordinates' work performance when supervisors interpreted the feedback-seeking behavior as being driven more by performance enhancement motives and less by impression management motives. Therefore, in this paper, we examine these two kinds of motives that supervisors might attribute to feedback seeking.

Figure 1 illustrates my hypothesized relationships. To provide an overview of the literature supporting this model,

we will first review past research that is relevant to the relationships between feedback seeking, role clarity, and satisfaction, followed by an overview of research on social skills.

A Priory model of Relationship Between Feedback Seeking, Social Skill and Feedback Seeking Social Skill Interaction, Role Clarity and Job Satisfaction



Feedback-Seeking Behavior and Job Satisfaction

Feedback communicates to the employee the extent to which organizational goals are met, provides information to evaluate performance, and helps employees determine which behaviors are desired by the organization, thus enabling employees to clarify their role expectations (Ashford and Cummings 1983). Because feedback provides this useful information, several studies have found a

positive link between feedback-seeking behavior and job satisfaction (Mignerey et al. 1995; Morrison 1993; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller 2000). For example, Morrison (1993) found that feedback seeking through direct inquiry, passive monitoring of others and feedback seeking through the use of written materials were all positively correlated with job satisfaction. In an uncommon exception to this pattern of findings, Ashford and Black (1996) studied proactive socialization behaviors among new employees and found that feedback seeking was unrelated to satisfaction. However, they measured a wide variety of socialization behaviors, many of which were broader than feedback seeking, and they may have subsumed active feedback-seeking behaviors as an antecedent of satisfaction. Thus, the literature fairly uniformly suggests a positive relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction.

However, the variables through which feedback seeking indirectly influences satisfaction is poorly understood (Ashford et al. 2003). Researchers in the organizational socialization domain hypothesize that proactive feedback seeking tactics enhance job satisfaction by serving to reduce employees' uncertainty, thereby instilling a sense of control for the individual actively seeking feedback (Louis et al. 1983). That is, the compulsion to reduce uncertainty induces feedback seeking, in turn engendering a sense of control, leading to a sense of job satisfaction. This reasoning implies that role clarity should function as an important mediator of the relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction.

This mediated relationship is further implied by empirical studies that have separately established relationships between feedback-seeking behavior and role

clarity, and between role clarity and job satisfaction. Because feedback seeking may reflect intentional behaviors or strategies used to obtain job-related information, many studies have found a relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and role clarity (e.g., Ashford & Cummings 1985; Brown, Ganesan & Challagalla 2001; Callister, Kramer & Turban 1999; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller 2000; Whitaker, Dahling & Levy, under review). Relatedly, Renn and Fedor (2001) found that feedback-seeking behavior improved performance through increased goal setting. Their findings suggest that employees who seek feedback tend to use it to set feedback-based personal improvement goals based on a better understanding of their roles and referent performance standards. The goals in turn helped to improve both the quality and quantity of employee performance. Thus, this body of research suggests that feedback-seeking behavior reduces uncertainty or ambiguity regarding one's position or one's performance that is particularly valuable in terms of improving feelings of control.

Furthermore, the direct link between role clarity and job satisfaction has been established by many studies (Abramis 1994; Glisson and Durick 1988; Organ and Greene 1974; Sawyer 1992). For example, Abramis (1994) conducted a meta-analysis on 88 studies that demonstrated that role ambiguity, the conceptual opposite of role clarity, is strongly and negatively related to job satisfaction. This finding implies that role clarity should relate positively to job satisfaction. Similarly, Sawyer (1992) broke role clarity into goal clarity, and understanding of the expectations associated with a role, and process clarity, an understanding of the activities that fulfill role expectations. He found that both variables were positively related to job satisfaction.

While we know of no research that has formally investigated the mediation of role clarity on the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and job satisfaction, this body of research suggests that the relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction is mediated by a clarification of organizational roles. Accordingly, We hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Supervisors' reports of feedback-seeking behavior will relate positively to subordinates' reports of role clarity.
Hypothesis 2: Subordinates' reports of role clarity will relate positively to subordinates' reports of job satisfaction.
Hypothesis 3: Subordinates' reports of role clarity will mediate the relationship between supervisors' reports of feedback-seeking behavior and subordinates' reports of job satisfaction.

Social Skill

A great deal of research indicates that individual differences, such as impression management, self- esteem, and public self-consciousness (Levy, Albright, Cawley & Williams 1995), and goal orientation (Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson 2002; VandeWalle 2003) shape the extent to which employees seek, perceive, and interpret feedback. However, to date no research has examined the role of social skill, the extent to which the seeker can read, understand, and control social interactions (Hogan & Shelton 1998; Witt & Ferris 2003), on the use of feedback information.

Researchers have given increased attention to the role of

social skill on various outcomes of interest to organizations (e.g., Hogan & Shelton 1998). For example, social skill has been found to have important main effects on training efficacy (Ferris, Bergin & Gilmore 1986) and leader emergence and effectiveness (Riggio, Riggio, Salinas & Cole 2003). Furthermore, it has also been found to moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance (Witt & Ferris, 2003), general mental ability and job performance (Ferris, Witt & Hochwarter 2001), and perceived organizational support and job performance (Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway & Ferris 2006), suggesting that it is an important and under-represented construct.

Hogan and Lock (1995) classified social skills into seven categories: sensitivity to others' needs, flexibility, and perceptiveness, instilling trust in others, consistency across interactions, being accountable and effective communication. Objectively, social skill is therefore a broad construct that includes the degree to which individuals can perceive useful information and communicate well (Hogan & Shelton 1998), both of which are critical for feedback seekers to gain necessary feedback and apply feedback information effectively. Importantly, Norton and Hope (2001) emphasized that social skill also reflects the ability to perceive social information, integrate it with existing goals, and use this new information to respond in a more effective manner. Thus, We expect that feedback seekers with higher social skill should be able to obtain higher-quality feedback, perceive greater meaning in feedback, integrate this new information into existing knowledge structures, and accordingly develop a better sense of role clarity. Thus:

Hypothesis 4: Social skill will moderate the relationship

between supervisor reports of feedback seeking and subordinate perceptions of role clarity. Specifically, the Interaction of feedback seeking and social skill will have a positive effect on role clarity.

Method

Participants

Participants were 252 undergraduate students from Career Institute of International Management & Career College, Barkatullah University working at least 25 hours per week, who were recruited for this study in the spring of 2009. The supervisors of those participants who consented to take part in the study were contacted via mail and asked to complete brief survey regarding the feedback seeking frequency of the target subordinate. Subordinates whose supervisors did not return surveys were excluded from further analysis. One hundred seventy supervisors returned the survey, yielding a response rate of 67.4%.

The mean age of the employed students was 22.8 with an average organizational tenure of approximately 27.04 months, working an average of 26.5 hours per week. The subordinate sample was 73.5% female and approximately 84.7% Caucasian, 11.8% African American, and 3.5% identified themselves as Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or Other.

The mean age of the supervisors was 39.14 years, with an average of 5.92 years of management tenure and an average of 22.6 months supervising the target employee. The supervisor sample was 60.6% female and approximately 82.9% were Caucasian, 6.8% African American, and 6.1% identified themselves as Asian,

Hispanic, Native American, or Other.

Procedures

Subordinate participants received extra-credit in exchange for taking part in this research project. Subordinate participants completed measures designed to assess their degree of job satisfaction, role clarity, and social skills. Upon survey completion, subordinates completed a consent form allowing their supervisors to be contacted regarding their work performance. Each consenting subordinate was then instructed to give a survey to his/her supervisor. The supervisor survey assessed demographic information and the extent to which subordinates engage in feedback seeking. Supervisors then mailed the completed surveys back to the researchers.

Measures

Subordinate Measures. We collected demographic information including age, race, weekly hours worked, type of job, and job tenure from subordinates. To assess role clarity, we used Sawyer's (1992) measures of goal clarity and process clarity. Each subscale has shown adequate reliability (α = .92 and .90, respectively) and each is composed of five items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = very uncertain, 6 = very certain). The combined scale demonstrated good reliability (α = .97). A sample item from the process clarity scale is, "Considering all your work tasks, how certain are you that you know the best ways to do these tasks?"

Job satisfaction was measured using 3 items (α = .89)

developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1979). A sample item reads, "All in all, We am satisfied with my job" and is set to a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Social skill was measured with Ferris et al.'s (2001) seven-item scale (α = .86), which is measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample items include, "We find it easy to put myself in the position of others," and "In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do."

Supervisor measure. Supervisors were asked to respond to Williams and Johnson's (2000) six-item feedback-seeking measure (α = .91) designed to tap the frequency with which subordinates directly seek feedback from their supervisors (three items) and their coworkers (three items). Sample items include "How often does the target employee ask you for information about what is required to function successfully on the job?" and "How often does the target employee ask coworkers how well he/she is doing performing on the job?". This scale is measured with a six-point scale ranging from "never" to "always."
While it is widely known, that employees distinguish between several salient sources for feedback in their work environment (e.g., the self, task, supervisor, co-workers, and the formal organization; Herold, Liden, & Leatherwood, 1987), we have chosen to rely on supervisor reports of feedback seeking for two reasons.

First, we sought to reduce to the effects of common method variance, a significant source of measurement error stemming from the same source of measurement, a design issue which may threaten the validity of the conclusions about the relationships between the constructs under study

(Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Second, several studies have found that employees consider source expertise when engaging in feedback seeking, especially when feedback seeking is carried out for the purposes of obtaining information pertaining to performance expectations and role clarity (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Morrison & Vancouver, 2000; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995). The results of these studies suggest that an individual will attempt to reduce uncertainty regarding his or her position by preferentially seeking feedback from supervisors than from other sources of feedback. Given that we frame feedback seeking as intentional behaviors employed to obtain job- related information and increase role clarity, and the aforementioned literature indicates that employees seek feedback from supervisors to a greater extent when attempting to obtain this type of feedback, the logical choice for the measurement of subordinate feedback seeking was supervisor reports.

Results

Analytic Strategy

LISREL 8.3 (Joreskog & Sorbom 1993) was used for structural equation modeling (SEM). We followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach wherein a measurement model is first assessed to test model fit, followed by a series of structural models to investigate hypothesized relationships. Following the recommendations of Williams and Anderson (1994) and Hall, Snell, and Foust (1999), items within feedback seeking, social skills, and role clarity scales were rationally grouped into parcels to serve as

indicators for latent variables. Three parcels were formed for both the feedback seeking and the feedback seeking X social skill interaction term; two each were formed for social skill and role clarity. Given that the job satisfaction scale is composed of only three items, we retained the individual items to serve as indicators of this latent construct.

Since the main focus of this study was on the moderating effect of social skill, We followed Jaccard and Wan's (1995) procedure for forming and investigating interaction terms in a SEM framework. According to this method, main effect variables are mean-centered prior to computing product term indicators as a way to decrease clarity between the main effects and the interaction terms. Additional constraints are added to latent product variances, latent product residuals, and latent indicator paths in order to ensure proper estimation (for a full description of the constraints, see Jaccard & Wan, 1995). Following these suggestions, three product terms indicators were randomly chosen from six possible product terms to represent the latent feedback seeking X social skill interaction term.

In assessing the adequacy of fit for the measurement and structural models, We used the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger 1990), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Bentler 1995), and the comparative fit index (CFI).

According to Vandenberg & Lance (2000), the lower bound for reasonable fit for the CFI is typically considered .90, while the upper bound for good fit is .080 and .10 for the RMSEA and SRMR, respectively. Furthermore, We use the chi-square difference test to compare the effects of imposing structural constraints on the measurement model (Joreskog & Sorbom 1993) as well as assess the fit of alternative structural models (Kline 2004).

The means, standard deviations, and coefficient alphas for the raw score variables are presented in Table 1, along with the latent variable correlations.

TABLE 1:

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of All Variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Study Variables						
1. Feedback Seeking	2.51	.83	(091)			
2. Social Skills	5.06	.88	.18*	(0.86)		
3. Role Clarity	5.14	1.01	027**	.09	(.97)	4.
Job Satisfaction	5.46	1.45	.07	.12	.28**	(0.89

Note: Reliabilities reported in parentheses.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The hypothesized measurement model fit the data well: $\chi^2(65, N = 170) = 147.10, p < .01$; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .060; SRMR = .048 (Table 2). Furthermore, the hypothesized structural model (Figure 2) fit the data well, $\chi^2(61, N = 170) = 134.88, p < .01$; CFI = .95; RMSEA =
.059; SRMR = .048 (Table 2). However, it led to a decrement in model fit relative to the measurement model, $\chi^2(4, N = 170) = 12.22, p < .05$.

TABLE 2:
Fit indices and statistics for the a priori, structural, and modified structural models.

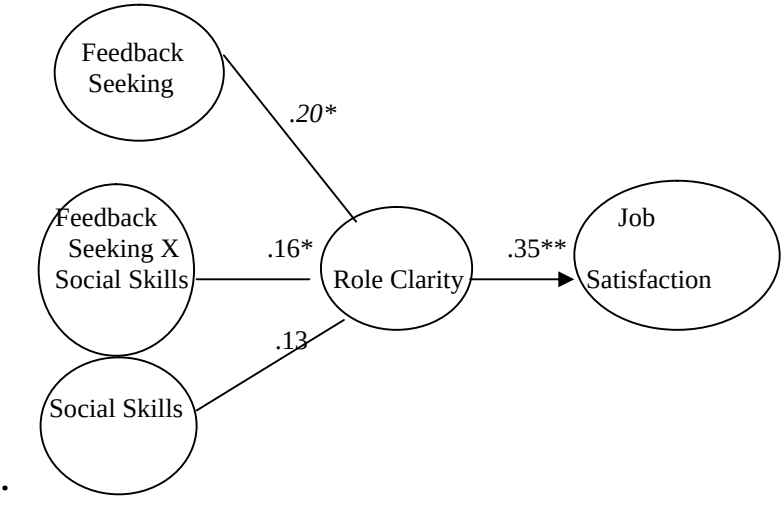
	X^2	*df*	*Δdf*	ΔX^2	*CFI*	*RMSEA*	*SRMR*
Model							
1. Measurement Model	147.10	65			.95	.060	.048
2. Structural Model	134.88	61	4	12.22*	.95	.059	.048
3. Alternative Model	134.42	60	1	.62	.95	.060	.048

Note: All analyses were carried out on *N* = 170. CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation. * *p* < .01.

Following suggestions to explore feasible models other than that hypothesized (Kline, 2004), an alternative model assessed whether role clarity partially mediates the feedback seeking /job satisfaction relationship, by including a direct path between feedback seeking and job satisfaction. The partial mediation model fit the data well $\chi^2(60, N = 170) = 134.42$, $p < .01$; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .060; SRMR = .048. However, compared to the hypothesized structural model, adding the direct link between feedback seeking and job satisfaction did not significantly improve model fit $\chi^2(1, N = 170) = .64$, $p =$ *ns*, indicating that role clarity fully mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction.

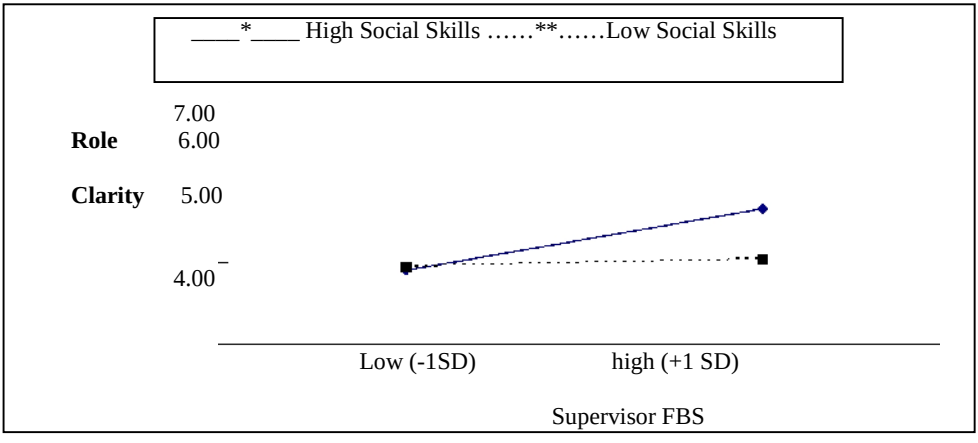
Examination of the paths in the final model (Figure 2) demonstrated that Hypothesis 1 was fully supported with supervisor reports of feedback-seeking behavior positively relating to subordinates' reports of role clarity. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was fully supported, as subordinate role clarity was positively associated with job satisfaction. As indicated above, Hypothesis 3 was supported as role clarity fully mediated the effects of feedback seeking on job satisfaction. Lastly, Hypothesis 4 was fully supported in that the feedback seeking X social skill interaction positively influenced role clarity, explaining 2.56% of the unique variance in role clarity.

FIGURE 2:
Final structural model with standardized regression weights. $\chi^2(61, N = 170) = 134.88, p < .01$; comparative fit index = .95; standardized root mean square residual = .048; root mean squared error of approximation = .059; ** p < .01; * p < .01. For ease of presentation, the standardized coefficients among the exogenous variables are not shown.



Using procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), the observed social skill interaction was plotted to examine the form of the moderated relationship. Figure 3 illustrates the interaction between social skill and feedback seeking on role clarity for values ± 1 standard deviation around the mean of feedback seeking. As expected and indicated by the figure, there is a positive slope between supervisor perceptions of feedback seeking and role clarity for those higher in social skills. Conversely, a positive yet non-significant relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity is demonstrated for those less adept in social situations.

FIGURE 3:*Feedback seeking by social skills interaction for role clarity*.



Discussion

As predicted, supervisor perceptions of subordinate feedback seeking were found to influence subordinate

reports of role clarity and ultimately job satisfaction. These results lend credence to the findings of other researchers that individually demonstrate that feedback seeking relates to job satisfaction (e.g., Abramis 1994), and that role clarity relates to job satisfaction (Morrison 1993). Furthermore, my results replicate findings of other researchers indicating that those that have a deeper understanding of their role within the organization and the processes in place also tend to be more highly satisfied with their jobs (Louis et al. 1983).

However, given that We also found that social skill positively moderates this mediated relationship, it seems that the mediation of feedback seeking and job satisfaction by role clarity is particularly salient among those high in social skills. Thus, employees who can a) successfully build alliances with valued sources of feedback information in the work environment, and b) effectively sift through feedback information to find the performance feedback that relates to success on the job, truly get the most out of the feedback exchange.

Our findings are particularly robust because supervisors provided ratings of feedback-seeking behavior. One limitation of the feedback-seeking literature is its over-reliance on self-reports of feedback seeking and outcomes, which may lead to inaccurate conclusions due to common method variance. While some argue that common method variance need not be a fatal flaw for an empirical manuscript (Kline, Sulsky & Rever-Moriyama 2000), our study is in a minority that attenuate the risk of common method variance through the use of alternate methods of data collection. By gathering responses from both supervisors and subordinates, we believe that we have minimized some of the potential pitfalls associated with

common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Implications

From an applied perspective, an understanding of the importance of social skill provides a mechanism for practitioners to influence role clarity. Social skill researchers are increasingly taking the perspective that this construct is only partially dispositional, and that social skill can be trained to some degree (Buck 1991; Burgoon & Dunbar 2000; Hochwarter et al. 2006). Taking this study's findings that that the interaction of feedback seeking and social skill accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in role clarity, in conjunction with the relationships between social skill and other desirable outcomes established in past research (e.g., leadership emergence; Riggio et al. 2003), organizations may do well to implement social skill training programs. Although the majority of the social skill training literature is written from a counseling perspective, some important recommendations could be derived from the occupational therapy literature for those practitioners interested in pursuing this training (Segrin & Givertz, 2003). For example, observation techniques show promise for teaching social skill (Bandura 1999; Topping, Bremer & Holmes 2000).

Our findings also join a large body of research that emphasizes the importance of employees' perceptions of role clarity. Whereas, we demonstrated that role clarity mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction, role clarity also relates indirectly to withdrawal behaviors and turnover (Sawyer 1992), and directly to stress (Cartwright & Cooper 1997) and performance (Abramis 1994). Thus, practitioners should pay special attention to

developing employees' sense of role clarity. Aside from feedback provision, research indicates that clarity can be enhanced through a variety of mechanisms, including quality leader relationships (Gerstner & Day 1997), recognition of accomplishments (Sawyer 1992), and job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham 1980).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the focus of my study was on individual differences that influence the outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior, an emerging body of research has emphasized the importance of contextual elements in the feedback process (de Luque & Sommer 2000; Herold & Parsons 1985; Steelman, Levy & Snell 2004; Williams, Miller, Steelman & Levy 1999) that we did not consider. For example, Steelman, Levy and Snell's (2004) measure of the feedback environment, the extent to which characteristics of the workplace encourage feedback seeking, includes dimensions that measure the quality of feedback provided and the credibility of the source providing it. Part of a supportive feedback environment therefore includes high quality feedback information from knowledgeable sources, which could diminish the extent to which a feedback seeker needs social skill to discern useful feedback and apply it to improve role clarity. Future researchers should continue to develop models that include both contextual variables and individual differences that shape feedback-seeking behavior (e.g., Levy et al. 1995).

We have also focused on the aspects of social skill that involve the ability to foster interpersonal relationships, perceive social information and integrate it with existing goals, and use this new information to respond in a more

effective manner. However, Hogan and Lock's (1995) conceptualization of social skill also includes the ability to engender trust in others, communicate effectively, and remain sensitive to the needs of others. Thus, it also makes conceptual sense to consider social skill as an antecedent of feedback-seeking behavior because individuals with high social skill should have higher -quality interactions with feedback sources that facilitate seeking behavior. This placement of social skill could have important implications for feedback researchers; for example, feedback seekers with high
social skill may not be as discouraged by impression management concerns in public contexts (Levy et al. 1995; Morrison & Bies 1991) because of their ability to effectively navigate these difficult social situations.

Limitations and Future Research

Like any study, this one is not without limitations. First, we cannot draw firm conclusions about causation from a cross-sectional study, and we cannot rule out the possibility of reverse causation. It is possible that a high-quality might encourage subordinates to seek feedback more frequently. Thus, researchers have found that employees seek feedback more often if their leaders are positively supportive (Vancouver & Morrison, 1995; Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999); further, mutual trust, respect for subordinates' ideas, and consideration of their feelings are positively related to feedback-seeking behavior (Vande Walle et al., 2000). Therefore, longitudinal studies are needed to provide firm evidence of causation. Second, because our data were collected only in China, one might question whether our findings and theory can be generalized to other cultural settings. Some researchers have shown that

feedback-seeking behavior may vary across cultures (Morrison, Chen, & Salgado, 2004; Sully de Luque & Sommer, 2000). For example, Morrison et al. (2004) found that employees in low-individualism and "high power distance" societies, such as China, may be less likely to seek feedback from their supervisors. Therefore, it is possible that different results may be found in other nations. Third, we only examined subordinates' feedback seeking in the form of verbal requests (inquiring). Facial expression, observations, monitoring, or other forms of feedback seeking were not been tested in this research because it is difficult to measure these behaviors. Therefore, future studies should develop measures to further investigate different forms of the feedback seeking of subordinates rated by supervisors and/or peers. Related to the third limitation is that we addressed the frequency of subordinates' feedback seeking and limited its target to immediate supervisors only, given that we were using a cross-sectional design. We did not examine patterns in other aspects of feedback-seeking behavior, such as the timing of feedback-seeking attempts (e.g., whether immediately following performance or after a delay) and a target's mood. One possible way to extend our model would be to address the question of why supervisors tend to attribute feedback-seeking behavior to performance enhancement and impression management motives. According to the cognitive information processing approach (Lord, 1985; Schneider, 1991), a supervisor tends to form a schema of attributions of each subordinate's behavior and underlying motives during the early stages of the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Wayne & Liden, 1995). Once relationships and roles have become established, the supervisor will often use the schema for a particular subordinate as a cognitive shortcut for making inferences

about the motives behind the subordinate's subsequent behavior. The schemata formed in the early stage of exchange processes may determine how supervisors interpret the subordinates' motives for behaviors in later exchanges (Lord & Maher, 1991). For this reason, we suggest
that future research examine how these schemata are developed and how they influence the way that supervisors make sense of and evaluate subordinates' behaviors. Our study could be extended by using a longitudinal research design, not only to address issues of causality as discussed above, but also to examine developing rather than established relationships.

Conclusion

Overall, these findings contribute to an emerging body of research concerned with the indirect effects of feedback seeking (Ashford et al., 2003). Specifically, we have clarified the relationship between feedback seeking and job satisfaction, and integrated social skill into the feedback seeking literature. Our results have useful implications for both researchers and practitioners to increase job satisfaction through a consideration of role clarity and the traits that shape employees' ability to use feedback information effectively. We found that subordinates' feedback-seeking behavior was more strongly, positively related to a high-quality leader-member relationship and subordinates' work performance when supervisors interpreted the feedback seeking as driven more by performance enhancement motives and less by impression

management motives. These findings suggest that supervisors do not have a simple appreciation of the explicitly proactive behaviors of their subordinates. Rather, it appears that they place great emphasis on the underlying motivations for these behaviors. Thus, our results have extended the feedback-seeking behavior literature by demonstrating the importance of supervisors' attributions of subordinates' motives for feedback seeking.

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