Toward a Goal Orientation–Based Feedback-Seeking Typology: Implications for Employee Performance Outcomes

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In this study, we conceptualized four types of feedback seeking about self and others (i.e., self-positive, self-negative, other-positive, and other-negative) based on their foci (i.e., self or peers) and nature (i.e., positive or negative), as derived from goal orientation theory. In a series of field studies, we found that these four types of feedback seeking were distinct from each other. A learning orientation was positively related to self-negative, self-positive, and other-positive feedback seeking. A performance-approach orientation was positively related to self-positive and other-negative feedback seeking. On further examining the performance impacts of the four types of feedback-seeking, we found that self-negative feedback seeking was positively related to job performance, role clarity, and social integration. Self-positive feedback seeking was negatively related, whereas other-positive feedback seeking was positively related to job performance.

Keywords: goal orientation; feedback seeking

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Feedback is a subset of information available to employees in their work environment that indicates the correctness of their behavior in achieving various goals (Ashford, 1986). Research on feedback seeking has exclusively focused on information that references the focal employee. In reality, employees also seek information on peer performance. Such information may inform the focal employee about how he or she is doing (i.e., social comparison; see Festinger, 1954) or how to perform effectively (i.e., social learning; see Bandura, 1986). Because information on peer performance is a potentially valuable resource that assists the focal employee to attain his or her goals, such information, when sought by the focal employee, can be viewed as a form of feedback. It is thus of interest whether this type of feedback seeking influences the focal employee's performance.

Moreover, feedback information—whether it references the focal employee or peer—can be of different natures (i.e., positive or negative). Curiously, when examining the influences of feedback seeking, researchers have largely not distinguished between and simultaneously contrasted positive and negative feedback seeking (see Ashford & Tsui, 1991, for the exception). The latest meta-analytic review found that the feedback seeking–job performance relationship is small (.07) and the credibility interval included zero (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015). A possible reason for this null effect is that the nature of the feedback sought has not been fully considered in previous research. "Whether the message is positive or negative … should … play a role in the outcomes [that] follow. These factors have not been measured with any precision to date" (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003: 785).

Therefore, our first goal is to develop a feedback-seeking typology that takes into account both the foci (i.e., self or peer) and nature (i.e., positive or negative) of feedback information. It is particularly relevant to this study that the theory and research on feedback seeking has not simultaneously incorporated the foci and nature of feedback information. In this study, we draw upon goal orientation theory (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) to conceptualize our typology. Specifically, a learning orientation focuses on competence development (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988), a performance-approach orientation focuses on gaining a favorable evaluation, and a performance-avoidance orientation focuses on avoiding the negation of one's competence (Elliot & Church, 1997; VandeWalle, 1997). A learning orientation involves self-comparison in that it focuses on self-competence improvement over time, whereas a performance (-approach and -avoidance) orientation involves social comparison with others in that it focuses on normative evaluation (Dweck, 1986, 2000; Nicholls, 1975). Given its focus on competence improvement, a learning orientation may prompt the seeking of negative feedback on self-performance or positive feedback on peer performance. A performance orientation may prompt the seeking of positive feedback on self-performance or negative feedback on peer performance to gain favorable, or avoid unfavorable, evaluations.

In short, goal orientation theory suggests that individuals may seek feedback on themselves or their peers that is either negative or positive. This leads to four types of feedback seeking: self-negative, self-positive, other-negative, and other-positive. In this study, self-positive feedback seeking refers to an employee's report of his or her information seeking regarding areas that he or she performs well through inquiring and monitoring different sources. Self-negative feedback seeking refers to an employee's report of his or her information seeking regarding areas that he or she underperforms through inquiring and monitoring different sources. Other-positive feedback seeking refers to an employee's report of his or her

information seeking regarding areas that peers perform well through inquiring and monitoring different sources. Other-negative feedback seeking refers to an employee's report of his or her information seeking regarding areas that peers underperform through inquiring and monitoring different sources. This typology and associated feedback-seeking types provide a conceptual contribution to the literature by *simultaneously* expanding (i.e., to peer-focused information) and refining (i.e., the positive–negative distinction) current conceptualization of feedback seeking.

With the new typology in place, our second goal is to advance the goal-orientation approach to feedback seeking. Research has examined the relationship between goal orientation and feedback seeking (Porath & Bateman, 2006; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000). However, the target has been on self-focused feedback information and the nature of feedback has not been clearly considered. Not surprisingly, findings from these studies varied widely. For instance, a performance approach orientation has been found to have a positive effect (Porath & Bateman, 2006), no effect, or even negative effect (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997) on self-focused feedback seeking. In this study, we refine extant knowledge by showing that different relationships with goal orientation may exist depending on the nature of self-focused feedback sought. Moreover, we expand current knowledge by linking goal orientation to other-focused feedback seeking hitherto neglected in the literature. By investigating the relationships that goal orientation has with the four types of feedback seeking, we also establish the theoretical validity of the feedback-seeking typology.

Our third goal is to advance research on feedback seeking and job performance using the new typology. Job performance is arguably the most important and ultimate criterion in which many managers are interested. Extant research has exclusively focused on the role of self-focused feedback seeking in job performance, leaving a serious knowledge gap regarding other-focused feedback seeking. We fill this knowledge gap by showing that other-focused positive feedback seeking does, whereas other-focused negative feedback seeking does not, enhance the focal employee's job performance. We also advance research on self-focused feedback seeking by directly contrasting the effects of self-negative and self-positive feedback seeking on job performance. Ashford and Tsui (1991) examined reputational effectiveness (measured as the extent to which the focal manager does the job the way the constituency prefers) rather than job performance as the outcome of self-focused negative and positive feedback seeking. Finally, we extend prior research (Ashford & Tsui, 1991) by expanding the outcomes to include role clarity and social integration.

We conduct the study in the Chinese context where collectivism is practiced and social relationships are emphasized (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Xin & Pearce, 1996). Although individuals from any culture are interested in information on own performance, employees in the Chinese culture, which emphasizes interdependence, are also interested in and influenced by information about peers. Similarly, although individuals from any culture would have a need to feel good about themselves and thus are interested in positive feedback, employees in the Chinese culture, which emphasizes self-cultivation and improvement (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Heine et al., 2001), are interested in and influenced by negative feedback. The Chinese context therefore represents an appropriate context to test the typology on self- and other-focused positive and negative feedback seeking.

A Goal Orientation-Based Feedback-Seeking Typology

Goal orientation theory suggests that an individual's goal orientation superorganizes the affective, behavioral, and cognitive processes of motivation (Dweck, 2000). Individuals with a strong learning orientation view competence as a malleable quality and pursue the goal of competence improvement (Button et al., 1996; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). They attribute setbacks to insufficient effort or ineffective strategies. Negative feedback is viewed as useful for improving competence and thus does not increase stress levels. As such, individuals with a strong learning orientation will alter strategies, increase effort, and persist to overcome challenges or obstacles. Individuals with a strong performance orientation conceive of competence as a fixed entity and are concerned about demonstrating the adequacy of their abilities or avoiding negative judgments from others. They experience anxiety and stress (Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000). Because they attribute failures or setbacks to their own lack of ability, they tend to choose easier tasks or to exert less effort (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Researchers have further divided performance orientation into two categories. Performance orientation with a focus on outperforming others and gaining favorable evaluations is termed a *proving* goal orientation (VandeWalle, 1997) or a performance-approach orientation (Elliot & Church, 1997). A performance orientation with a focus on avoiding negative judgments or appearing incompetent is termed an *avoiding* goal orientation (VandeWalle, 1997) or a performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot & Church, 1997). In a meta-analysis, Day, Yeo, and Radosevich (2003) demonstrated that the three-factor model of goal orientation is superior to the two-factor model. A performance-approach orientation focuses on demonstrating the adequacy of one's ability and hence is not necessarily dysfunctional (Day et al., 2003; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007). A performance-avoidance orientation tends to be dysfunctional because it is related to anxiety, distraction, withdrawal, and low self-efficacy (Day et al., 2003). More recently, Payne, Youngcourt, and Beaubien (2007) found that the three types of goal orientation are relatively stable over time, suggesting that they may provide a dispositional basis for engendering behaviors such as feedback seeking.

A Two-Dimensional Typology of Feedback Seeking

Feedback seeking is a motivated behavior and thus may be determined by the types of goals that individuals pursue (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Butler, 2000). Goal orientation theory suggests three goals: learning, performance approach, and performance avoidance goals. A learning orientation is characterized by an internal focus on mastery, whereas a performance orientation has an external focus on social comparison (Chen et al., 2000; Nicholls, 1975). Goal orientation theory thus reveals that individuals may seek feedback on their own performance or that of their peers (i.e., the self–other dimension). The focus on competence improvement with a learning orientation and on gaining favorable evaluations or avoiding unfavorable ones with a performance orientation reveals the different functionalities of feedback seeking and thus the nature of the feedback sought (i.e., the positive–negative dimension). On this basis, we propose two dimensions of feedback seeking: its foci (i.e., *self* or *other*) and its nature (i.e., *positive* or *negative*). Positive feedback reflects areas or aspects in which an employee performs well, whereas negative feedback indicates areas or aspects that are weak and thus need improvement. The two dimensions generate four types of feedback-seeking behavior.

The first two types concern feedback on the focal employee. In *self-negative feedback seeking, the focal employee* seeks information regarding areas or aspects that are weak or below expectations. In *self-positive feedback seeking, the focal employee* seeks information regarding areas or aspects in which he or she does well. Because the information is self-focused, employees may directly ask their supervisors and peers (i.e., direct inquiry) (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). They may also ask indirectly (i.e., indirect inquiry) or monitor (i.e., pay attention to) cues so that the seekers or sources do not feel uncomfortable (Miller & Jablin, 1991). For example, the seekers may avoid boasting when seeking positive feedback, and supervisors or peers can avoid giving embarrassing direct responses when feedback is negative.

The third and fourth types concern information on peers. From the social learning perspective, such information can be an instrumental resource for improving one's own competence and performance. Other-focused feedback seeking is not limited to a particular colleague, although it could be so for a single feedback-seeking incident. In *other-negative feedback seeking, the focal employee* seeks information on areas or aspects in which colleagues fail to perform well. In *other-positive feedback seeking, the focal employee* seeks information on areas or aspects in which colleagues perform well. An employee relies more on indirect inquiry (e.g., through third parties—the supervisor or individuals other than the peer on whom the information is sought in a particular feedback-seeking incident) and monitoring (e.g., observing supervisor's reactions) to gather information on others due to the lower accessibility and higher interpersonal sensitivity of such information (Miller & Jablin, 1991). For example, an employee may feel that it is inappropriate to directly ask colleagues for information about their performance. Colleagues may be reluctant to disclose the "secrets" of their success and, when asked, may feel uneasy about responding to the inquiry. It is even more sensitive to directly ask colleagues about areas in which they have failed. It embarrasses the colleague, causes bad feelings and suspicion, and damages interpersonal relationships.

We conceptualize self-positive, self-negative, other-positive, and other-negative feedback seeking as four broad but distinct types of feedback-seeking behaviors. Each type of feedback seeking involves behavioral strategies (e.g., inquiry and monitoring) and information sources (e.g., supervisor and peer). In other words, strategies and sources are conceptualized as elements of each type of feedback seeking. This is similar to prior studies that have combined different behavioral strategies and/or sources when examining feedback seeking (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Black, 1996; Renn & Fedor, 2001; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997).

Goal Orientation and the Four Types of Feedback-Seeking Behavior

If information is a resource that facilitates the realization of various goals, the perceived importance of a given goal should affect the perceived value of certain types of feedback and the seeking of it during the motivational process (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Our key argument is that goal orientation influences an individual's tendency to seek a certain type of feedback based on its value in attaining the overarching goal being pursued.

Because a learning orientation is focused on competence improvement, feedback on areas in need of improvement should be particularly valuable. This type of feedback is critical

because improvement can only be made when a gap is identified. Self-negative feedback is nonthreatening because the information is diagnostic in nature for people with a strong learning orientation and is used for developmental rather than evaluative purposes. Thus, we expect a learning orientation to be positively related to self-negative feedback seeking. A learning orientation is characterized by a focus on moving to a more desirable state (i.e., new or better skills) rather than simply repeating what one does currently. We do not expect a significant positive effect of a learning orientation on self-positive feedback seeking because such feedback does not inform employees about what to move to (improve or develop) and thus is not directly related to the purpose of competence improvement associated with a learning orientation. In other words, self-positive feedback does not have a high value for employees with a learning orientation. On the other hand, we do not expect a learning orientation to reduce self-positive feedback seeking because continuing to do what one does well may lead to refinement of skills, a different kind of learning. Moreover, self-positive feedback seeking may reveal opportunities to build on and broaden one's skills, an approach that fits a learning orientation. Given the conflicting arguments, we do not hypothesize the relationship between a learning orientation and self-positive feedback seeking.

Although a learning orientation focuses on self-improvement, it may lead to the search for other-focused feedback when such feedback provides useful information in guiding employees to improve their own behaviors. Social learning theory suggests that individuals can achieve learning (competence development) through modeling (Bandura, 1986). Effective peers serve as models and represent an important source of learning that leads to self-improvement. Other-positive feedback seeking refers to the seeking of information regarding what peers do well. A learning orientation is characterized by a focus on competence development, and other-positive feedback seeking helps to achieve this goal through learning from peers. In other words, a learning orientation should direct an individual toward other-positive feedback seeking because the resulting information can inform him or her in the effort to enhance his or her competence. We do not expect a learning orientation to significantly enhance other-negative feedback seeking. Although such information may inform an employee about what *not* to do, it does not serve as an effective guide on what to do and therefore is not particularly valuable for self-improvement. In addition, other-negative feedback-seeking behavior, when detected, may cause embarrassment and negatively influence interpersonal relationships. In the absence of high-value returns for achieving the goal of self-improvement, individuals with a strong learning orientation may not actively engage in other-negative feedback seeking. To sum up, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 1:* A learning orientation is positively related to (a) self-negative and (b) other-positive feedback seeking.

A performance orientation is focused on the ability goal (i.e., demonstration of the adequacy of one's ability or avoiding the demonstration of one's lack of ability). It motivates individuals to seek feedback that enhances their positive self-perception (i.e., self-enhancement) or to avoid feedback that threatens it (i.e., defensive impression management) (Butler, 2000). Specifically, a performance-approach orientation elicits the desire to be seen as competent, whereas performance-avoidance orientation engenders the desire to avoid looking incompetent (VandeWalle, 1997). Both the performance-approach and -avoidance orientations direct individuals toward self-positive feedback, because such information

engenders positive self-perceptions. Such information also informs performance-oriented individuals about their areas of performance strengths and tells them what tasks to continue in order to look competent or avoid looking incompetent.

Both the performance-approach and -avoidance orientations may turn individuals away from self-negative feedback because such information contradicts the ability goal and threatens the self-image (Dweck, 2000; VandeWalle, 2003). On the other hand, because of the focus on gaining positive evaluation, it is possible that individuals with a performance-approach orientation may seek information on what one does not do well, avoid them, and focus on what one does well, thus making one appear competent. Individuals with a performance-avoidance orientation may desire to find out what tasks one is not able to complete successfully. In doing so, they can discontinue those tasks (before a full-blown failure is realized) or avoid those tasks all together in the future in order to better achieve ego protection. Finally, self-focused feedback, including negative feedback, is needed for evaluative social comparison, which is the focus of a performance orientation. A performance orientation may thus lead to a degree of interest in self-negative feedback. As such, the paradox is that although individuals with a performance orientation may not be intrinsically interested in and enthusiastic about self-negative feedback information, they would need such information to make social comparison and to avoid further troubles. Given the counteracting psychological forces, we do not predict a significant overall relationship with self-negative feedback seeking for performance-approach and -avoidance orientations.

A performance orientation is externally referenced (Chen et al., 2000; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1975), and feedback on how others perform is relevant for the purposes of social comparison. In particular, the performance-approach and -avoidance orientations direct individuals toward other-negative feedback because such information carries a low ego cost and helps achieve the ability goal through positive social comparison. It also informs these individuals about the kinds of tasks to avoid in the future (i.e., those that others failed). We do not expect a significant relationship between a performance orientation and other-positive feedback seeking. On the one hand, other-positive feedback is part and parcel of other-related information needed for social comparison. Other-positive feedback seeking may also serve the instrumental purpose of helping one to do better, thus gaining positive evaluation. A performance orientation may thus lead to some interest in such information. On the other hand, other-positive feedback involves a high ego cost and contradicts the ability goal through negative social comparison. Given these counteracting forces, we do not expect a significant relationship. To sum up, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: A performance-approach orientation is positively related to (a) self-positive and (b) other-negative feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 3: A performance-avoidance orientation is positively related to (a) self-positive and (b) other-negative feedback seeking.

Pilot Study

Because no systematic measurement is available for the two-dimensional feedback-seeking typology, we developed measures based on Hinkin (1998) and Schwab (1980). We first present the pilot study, which comprised item development, assessment of the content validity, and exploratory (Sample 1) and confirmatory (Samples 2 and 3) factor analyses to

examine the factor structure (construct validity) and reliability of the measures. We then present Study 1, which assesses the theoretical foundation for the feedback-seeking typology. This is accomplished by examining the relationship between goal orientation and the four types of feedback seeking. All of the studies were conducted in China, and all of the surveys were administered in Chinese.

Item Development

Two of the authors reviewed the literature before developing the items in Chinese. Following the recommendations of Hinkin (1998), two of the authors wrote seven items for each type of feedback seeking based on the conceptual definition for each. This led to an initial pool of 28 items. Two management researchers then reviewed the items for clarity and consistency with the definitions. Revisions were made based on their comments. These 28 items were then subjected to content validity assessment. Four doctoral students, three management faculty members, and two employees who were not involved in the early review process were selected as judges. Along with the items, a form including descriptions of the four types of feedback seeking was distributed to each of the 10 judges. In the space beside each item, each judge checked the type of feedback seeking that the item matched. The respondents were instructed to insert "NA" beside items that they believed did not describe any of the types. Twenty-four items were correctly categorized by at least 8 of the 10 judges, exceeding the 75% minimum agreement criterion (Hinkin, 1998).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)—Sample 1

We distributed the feedback-seeking measures to a sample of 129 part-time MBA students. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. The participants were asked to reflect on their behavior at work and to evaluate the extent to which they agreed that each statement accurately described themselves (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The participants were instructed to complete the survey outside of class, seal it in the envelope provided, and deliver it to their course instructor. All of the participants who we contacted returned the completed survey. The average age was 36.15, 58% were male, and the average company tenure was 7.95 years.

Following Hinkin (1998) and Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, and Strahan (1999), we conducted EFA with maximum likelihood extraction and promax rotation. The results indicated four factors. All of the items loaded on the respective factors with loadings greater than .40 with no major cross-loadings (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986). Table 1 presents the items (in English) and factor loadings. The items were translated into English following the back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). A bilingual management researcher translated the items from Chinese into English, and another bilingual management researcher then independently translated the items back into Chinese. The two Chinese versions were compared and found to be comparable. Table 2 presents correlations among the four factors.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)—Sample 2

We collected a more diverse sample to cross-validate the measures. We contacted 357 part-time MBA (n_1 = 285), Master of Professional Accounting (n_2 = 44), and Master of

Table 1
Exploratory Factor Analysis Results: Sample 1—Pilot Study

Items	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
1. I often indirectly ask for information on what I failed to perform.	.06	.07	.23	.67
2. I often observe my supervisor or colleagues to seek negative information on my performance.	.15	.23	.18	.48
3. I often seek comments concerning what areas I did not do well in upon task completion.	.18	.06	.15	.80
4. I often ask for my supervisor's comments concerning my below-expectation performance areas.	.06	.14	.34	.62
5. I often seek negative comments on areas I did not perform well in during task engagement.	.16	.06	.14	.84
6. I often ask my colleagues for negative information to understand my performance weaknesses.	.09	.18	.21	.69
7. I often indirectly ask information on what I performed well in.	.02	.25	.53	.23
8. I often pay attention to whether my job behavior is emulated by others.	.33	−.07	.64	.13
9. I often seek information concerning what areas I performed well in upon task completion.	.10	.07	.79	.24
10. I often ask my supervisor for information concerning what areas I performed well in.	.11	.06	.87	.25
11. I often seek information on my good performance during task engagement.	.16	.11	.79	.27
12. I often ask my colleagues for information concerning my performance strengths.	.33	.03	.75	.17
13. I often ask information from third parties (e.g., supervisor) regarding what colleagues failed to perform.	.06	.56	.26	.24
14. I often pay attention to colleagues' negative moods upon the completion of a task.	.26	.78	−.03	.21
15. I often pay attention when colleagues are scolded by my supervisor during and after task engagement.	.19	.88	.05	.03
16. I often pay attention to my supervisor's negative reactions to colleagues' work.	.31	.82	−.01	.21
17. I often pay attention to my supervisor's negative comments on colleagues' work.	.25	.88	.03	.08
18. I often pay attention to my supervisor's or other colleagues' criticisms of a colleague's work.	.29	.86	.12	.05
19. I often ask information from third parties (e.g., supervisor) regarding what colleagues performed well in.	.42	.23	.25	.21
20. I often pay attention to colleagues' positive moods upon the completion of a task.	.77	.35	.15	.15
21. I often pay attention when colleagues are praised by my supervisor during and after task engagement.	.86	.29	.21	.11
22. I often pay attention to my supervisor's positive comments on colleagues' work.	.91	.27	.17	.13
23. I often pay attention to my supervisor's affirmation of colleagues' work.	.91	.23	.19	.15
24. I often pay attention to my supervisor's or other colleagues' discussion of a colleague's work strengths.	.88	.20	.16	.12

Table 2
Correlations Among Four Factors—Pilot Study

	Self-negative feedback seeking	Self-positive feedback seeking	Other-negative feedback seeking	Other-positive feedback seeking
Self-negative feedback seeking	—	.56	.27	.33
Self-positive feedback seeking	.46	—	.23	.40
Other-negative feedback seeking	.21	.33	—	.55
Other-positive feedback seeking	.43	.44	.54	—

Note: Correlations for Sample 1 are presented above the diagonal; correlations for Sample 2 are presented below the diagonal. All correlations are significant at $p < .01$.

Publication Administration ($n_3 = 28$) students. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. The participants responded to a survey on feedback-seeking behavior. The participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement accurately described themselves (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). They were instructed to complete the survey outside of class and return it to their course instructor in a sealed envelope. We received responses from 304 participants, representing an 85% response rate. The average age of the participants was 31.03, 67% were male, and the average company tenure was 7.02 years.

We conducted CFA using LISREL 8.3. The results indicated that the four-factor model had a reasonable fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 621.12, p < .01$; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .073; Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) = .97; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .97; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .97. The correlation residuals among all items were also calculated. Sixteen out of 276 residual correlations were larger than .10. Kline (2011) suggested that "correlation residuals with absolute values > .10 suggest that the model does not explain the corresponding sample correlation very well" and that "the more there are, the worse the explanatory power of the model for specific observed associations" (p. 171). Given that only 5.80% of correlation residuals were larger than .10, we believe the explanatory power of our model was adequate.

We then compared the four-factor model to three alternative models: (a) a two-factor model in which we combined the negative and positive feedback-seeking items for the self and other dimensions, respectively; (b) a two-factor model in which we combined the self and other feedback-seeking items for the positive and negative dimensions, respectively; and (c) a one-factor model in which we combined all four factors. The results indicated that the four-factor model was superior to the alternative models. None of the alternative models achieved an acceptable fit (see Table 3). The Cronbach's α for self-negative, self-positive, other-negative, and other-positive feedback seeking was .86, .91, .93, and .93, respectively.

We also checked the discriminant validity of the feedback-seeking measures with job self-efficacy (a three-item measure from Spreitzer, 1995) and emotional intelligence (EI) (a 16-item measure from Wong & Law, 2002). We contacted 428 employees from six companies and obtained 378 usable responses (Sample 3). On average, respondents were 31.92

Table 3
Model Comparisons Results: Sample 2—Pilot Study

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	NNFI	CFI	IFI	$\Delta\chi^2$
1. Four-factor model	621.12	246	.073 (90% CI: .066, .080)	.97	.97	.97	
2a. Two-factor: Self and other	3261.06	251	.21	.85	.86	.86	2,639.94**
2b. Two-factor: Negative and positive	3,578.60	251	.22	.82	.84	.84	2,957.48**
3. One-factor model: Feedback seeking	4,813.47	252	.25	.77	.79	.79	4,192.35**

Note: RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; NNFI = Non-Normed Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index.
**$p < .01$.

years old ($SD = 7.45$), 67% were male, the average organizational tenure was 5.79 years (SD = 5.37), and 31% had a high school degree, 60% had a bachelor's degree, and 9% had a master's or doctoral degree.

The Cronbach's alpha for self-negative feedback seeking, self-positive feedback seeking, other-negative feedback seeking, other-positive feedback seeking, EI, and self-efficacy was .82, .82, .87, .87, .93, and .88, respectively. We subjected feedback-seeking measures, self-efficacy, and EI to one CFA. The six-factor model fit the data reasonably well: $\chi^2 = 1,206.25$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .07; NNFI = .93; CFI = .93; and IFI = .93. We compared the six-factor model with eight five-factor models (i.e., either EI or self-efficacy was combined with each of the four types of feedback seeking). The six-factor model fit the data significantly better than all the alternative models. None of the alternative models reached an acceptable fit. The correlations that the four feedback-seeking measures had with job self-efficacy and EI were mostly small or not significant. Self-negative feedback seeking was positively related to EI ($r = .35$, $p < .01$) and job self-efficacy ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Self-positive feedback seeking was positively related to EI ($r = .24$, $p < .01$) and job self-efficacy ($r = .15$, $p < .01$). Other-negative feedback seeking was not significantly related to EI ($r = -.06$, $p > .10$) and job self-efficacy ($r = -.06$, $p > .10$). Other-positive feedback seeking was positively related to EI ($r = .18$, $p < .01$) but not job self-efficacy ($r = .08$, $p > .10$). Overall, these results suggested that the feedback-seeking measures were not another indicator of self-efficacy, interpersonal sensitivity, or more broadly, EI.

Study 1

In Study 1, we assessed the theoretical foundation for the feedback-seeking typology by examining the goal orientation–feedback seeking relationship. By so doing, we provided evidence to validate the feedback-seeking typology. We collected data from a company that specialized in designing, manufacturing, and marketing infants and children's products (e.g., apparel, footwear, and accessories). We sent questionnaires to all 375 retail employees (excluding managers) from the company. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that their responses would be confidential, and that the code on the surveys would only be used to match their responses to the different surveys. The participants responded to two surveys in their own time and returned them to one of the authors using the stamped addressed envelope provided. A token gift was given to each participant for participation in the study.

At Time 1, we sent a survey on goal orientation and demographics to the participants. The goal orientation measure, which was originally in English, was translated into Chinese based on the translation and back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). In agreement with the company, we sent a survey on feedback seeking to the participants 3 months later. All of the items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). We received 210 complete responses to both surveys for all study variables, giving a 56% response rate.

Measures

Goal orientation. We measured goal orientation using the scale of VandeWalle (1997). The Cronbach's α for a learning orientation, performance-approach orientation, and performance-avoidance orientation was .91, .80, and .88, respectively.

Feedback seeking. We measured feedback seeking using the measures developed in the pilot study. The CFA results indicated that the four-factor model had a good fit to the data: χ^2 = 740.88, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .07; NNFI = .96; CFI = .96; IFI = .96. Similar to our approach in the pilot study, we compared the four-factor model to three alternative models. The model comparison results indicated that the four-factor model was superior to all three alternative models. None of the alternative models achieved an acceptable fit. The Cronbach's α for self-negative, self-positive, other-negative, and other-positive feedback seeking was .89, .94, .92, and .93, respectively.

To check the discriminant validity of the feedback-seeking measures, we subjected goal orientation and feedback seeking to a CFA. The seven-factor model fit the data well: χ^2 = 1,213.10, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .068; NNFI = .96; CFI = .96; IFI = .96. We then compared the seven-factor model to three alternative models: (a) a five-factor model in which we combined the negative and positive feedback-seeking items for the self and other dimensions, respectively; (b) a five-factor model in which we combined the self and other feedback-seeking items for the positive and negative dimensions, respectively; and (c) a four-factor model in which we combined all four feedback-seeking factors. None of the alternative models achieved an acceptable fit.

Following previous research, we controlled for age, education, company tenure, and rank (e.g., Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986). With increasing age and company tenure, individuals should understand expectations better and face potentially higher face-loss costs, which should reduce feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986). A similar rationale applies to individuals at higher ranks. Individuals with lower education tend to be less proactive, have less confidence, and perceive greater cost in feedback seeking. On the other hand, they may perceive a greater need (value) to seek feedback. We did not include gender, because all participants were female. The average age of the respondents was 29.12, and the average company tenure was 3.52 years. We coded education (two categories) and rank (three categories) as dummy variables.

Results

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. To test the hypotheses, we specified a path analysis model, estimating the effects of the control variables and the goal orientations on the four feedback-seeking variables. Following an anonymous

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations—Study 1

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	29.12	5.67	—											
2. Education	0.63	0.48	.27	—										
3. Rank: salesperson	0.49	0.50	-.15	-.20	—									
4. Rank: store assistant	0.41	0.49	-.01	.11	-.82	—								
5. Organizational tenure	42.18	45.07	.39	.25	-.56	.24	—							
6. Learning orientation	5.06	1.08	-.03	-.09	.06	-.05	-.03	—						
7. Performance approach orientation	4.21	1.30	-.07	.01	-.03	.07	.04	.35	—					
8. Performance avoidance orientation	3.89	1.43	-.04	.18	-.10	.06	.11	.07	.37	—				
9. Self-negative feedback seeking	5.24	0.98	.08	-.10	-.07	.01	.15	.31	.13	.03	—			
10. Self-positive feedback seeking	4.89	1.03	.01	-.16	-.11	.09	.15	.27	.26	.02	.75	—		
11. Other-negative feedback seeking	4.11	1.41	-.03	-.05	-.00	-.04	.06	.11	.20	.14	.33	.44	—	
12. Other-positive feedback seeking	4.78	1.19	-.05	-.12	.07	-.07	-.01	.25	.22	.09	.48	.52	.66	—

Note: $N = 210$. An absolute value of correlation $\geq .14$ is significant at the $p < .05$ level. An absolute value of correlation $\geq .18$ is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 5
Path Analysis Results—Study 1

	Self-negative feedback seeking		Self-positive feedback seeking		Other-negative feedback seeking		Other-positive feedback seeking	
	Est.	SE	Est.	SE	Est.	SE	Est.	SE
Control variables								
Age	.01	(.01)	.00	(.01)	−.01	(.02)	.00	(.02)
Education	−.26	(.14)	−.40**	(.15)	−.23	(.21)	−.26	(.17)
Organizational tenure	.00	(.00)	.00	(.00)	.00	(.00)	.00	(.00)
Rank: salesperson	−.12	(.29)	−.07	(.30)	−.27	(.43)	.05	(.36)
Rank: store assistants	−.10	(.25)	.08	(.26)	−.40	(.37)	−.13	(.31)
Key predictors								
Learning orientation	.25**	(.06)	.19**	(.07)	.06	(.09)	.20*	(.08)
Performance approach orientation	.05	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.17*	(.08)	.13	(.07)
Performance avoidance orientation	.00	(.05)	−.04	(.05)	.09	(.07)	.04	(.06)

Note: $N = 210$. Table includes unstandardized coefficients. The standard errors are reported in parentheses.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

reviewer's recommendation, we also correlated the error terms of the feedback-seeking variables. This resulted in a saturated model, which yielded a perfect fit to the data. Table 5 presents the results of this model. The results indicated that a learning orientation was positively related to self-negative ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$) and other-positive feedback seeking ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$). These results supported Hypothesis 1. Although not hypothesized, we found that a learning orientation was positively related to self-positive feedback seeking ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). A performance-approach orientation was positively related to self-positive ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$) and other-negative feedback seeking ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, we found that a performance-avoidance orientation was not significantly related to self-positive and other-negative feedback seeking. We discuss this unexpected finding in the General Discussion section. We also ran analyses without the control variables. The pattern of the results remained the same.

Performance Implications of Feedback-Seeking Typology

We have shown that goal orientation theory provides a theoretical basis for the feedback-seeking typology, and we developed and validated measures for the resulting four types of feedback seeking. In this section, we examine the performance outcomes of the four types of feedback seeking. We aim to show that the influence of feedback seeking on employee outcomes depends on both the foci and the nature of the feedback sought.

First, we propose that feedback seeking helps enhance job performance in ways that vary depending on the specific types of feedback seeking. In the workplace, employees need to recognize their weaknesses and to improve on them. Self-negative feedback seeking improves job performance because it expands the set of competencies one possesses and increases the

effort exerted at work. Specifically, through self-negative feedback seeking, employees recognize areas in need of improvement and deficiencies in competences, and obtain diagnostic information for improvement. This type of information contains cues that support learning and thus can "yield impressive gains in performance" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996: 278). According to the resource perspective (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), self-negative feedback provides a valuable resource for error correction and thus improves performance.

The predicted positive effect of self-negative feedback seeking on job performance is also consistent with the control theory of motivation (Carver & Scheier, 1998). This theory implies that individuals will increase their effort in response to a performance gap (i.e., a discrepancy between expected standards and current performance) and will reduce their effort when the gap decreases. Self-negative feedback seeking increases the perception of the performance gap and thus encourages efforts to close it. Finally, self-negative feedback seeking signals to the supervisor that the employee is striving for improvement or excellence, a personal quality often appreciated by supervisors, and the supervisor may give more support to the employee in return.

Although positive feedback satisfies the self-confirmation need and enhances self-esteem (Trope & Neter, 1994), it may hurt future job performance because the resulting information neither helps identify deficiencies nor provides motivation to exert oneself to improve or excel. When the focus is on the employee's successes, the employee does not perceive the performance gap. Control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998) suggests that employees may see little need to increase their effort in such a scenario. Self-positive feedback seeking may signal a sense of self-contentment or an underlying insecurity. Supervisors may form a negative view of, and thus lower their support for, the employee, and employee job performance suffers accordingly. To sum up, we offer the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: Self-negative feedback seeking is positively related to job performance.
Hypothesis 5: Self-positive feedback seeking is negatively related to job performance.

Much of human knowledge and many skills are acquired through observing others (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theory suggests that individuals have the capacity to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of those exhibited by other effective individuals (Bandura, 1986). Other-positive feedback seeking provides an information resource for expanding and improving an employee's own skill repertoire as he or she learns from the success of others. Through other-positive feedback seeking, an employee can acquire effective behavior that helps improve his or her own performance. Other-positive feedback seeking signals an underlying sense of security and assurance, conveying that the employee is striving to learn and to improve. Supervisors generally appreciate efforts to improve performance and may give more support in return.

Other-negative feedback seeking has two potential effects on job performance. First, observing ineffective models reveals potential mistakes, which serves to remind an employee to avoid them. This suggests that other-negative feedback seeking may have some beneficial effects. However, these beneficial effects would normally be limited, because ineffective models do not serve as a guide to effective behavior. Second, exposure to other-negative feedback may generate the (sometimes false) perception that the employee is doing well and thus there is little need for effort to close the gap (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Other-negative feedback seeking may signal to the supervisor the existence of underlying insecurity in the

employee. Supervisors may question the employee's self-confidence and downgrade their assessment of the employee. Because of these opposing influences, we do not hypothesize a relationship between other-negative feedback seeking and job performance. Instead, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Other-positive feedback seeking is positively related to the focal employee's job performance, whereas other-negative feedback seeking is not.

Although job performance is the ultimate outcome managers and employees seek to achieve, we also include role clarity and social integration in order to examine a broader range of outcomes. Role clarity refers to the understanding of one's job, expectations, and responsibilities. To effectively regulate behavior, employees must have a clear and accurate understanding of their roles. Lack of clarity can lead to misdirected efforts and unfulfilled role expectations. Because role expectations are specific to individual employees, we expect self-focused, but not other-focused, feedback to be directly relevant to the focal employee's role clarity.

Employees clarify their roles when they interact with supervisors and colleagues, deliver in their expected roles, and obtain feedback. Although the effect of feedback seeking on role clarity is generally believed to be positive, the actual effects vary substantially (from negative to positive) between studies (Bauer & Green, 1998; Brown, Ganesan, & Challagalla, 2001; Morrison, 1993). The nature of feedback sought (i.e., positive vs. negative) may partially explain the varied findings. Feedback that "can be used to make adjustments when needed" (Morrison, 1993, p. 174) enhances role clarity. Hence, we posit that self-negative feedback seeking should increase role clarity. In essence, feedback about areas or aspects in need of improvement conveys role expectations and standards; it also motivates employees to meet them through discrepancy reduction (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Self-positive feedback seeking, in contrast, reveals little about needed adjustments. By focusing on what they already do well, employees may experience little motivation to search for unfulfilled role expectations and to meet them. Over time, this may lead to the neglect of certain role expectations. Self-positive feedback seeking may signal a sense of self-contentment. When an employee seeks self-positive feedback, supervisors and peers may view him or her unfavorably and thus provide less support when it comes to the information sharing that is critical for clarifying role expectations.

We expect similar effects on social integration or the integration of an employee into his or her work group or unit. Previous research on feedback seeking and social integration has not distinguished between negative and positive feedback seeking. Social integration involves adapting to the existing group or unit. To successfully adapt, employees must know what adjustments they need to make. Self-negative feedback seeking provides such diagnostic information. Self-negative feedback seeking reveals aspects in need of improvement and motivates employees to improve through discrepancy reduction (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Moreover, as Morrison (1993) pointed out, "social integration is largely a process of developing relationships" (p. 174). Self-negative feedback seeking signals that an employee is motivated to adapt to the existing group. Colleagues and supervisors alike are then more likely to develop social relationships with the employee and help him or her to integrate into the group. Self-positive feedback seeking, in contrast, does not provide diagnostic information about what adjustments an employee needs to make in order to achieve better social

integration. Because self-positive feedback seeking focuses an employee's attention on what he or she did well, the employee may actually overlook his or her deficiencies. A focus on self-positive feedback seeking does not motivate the employee to strive harder, either because the employee does not see deficiencies and the need for improvement (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Furthermore, self-positive feedback seeking may signal to colleagues and supervisors that the employee is self-content or insecure. Supervisors and peers thus form a negative view of the employee, which impedes the development of interpersonal relationships and ultimately integration into the group or unit. Supervisors and peers may also lower support (e.g., provision of crucial information) to the employee, leading to lower social integration. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 7:* Self-negative feedback seeking is positively related to (a) role clarity and (b) social integration.
> *Hypothesis 8:* Self-positive feedback seeking is negatively related to (a) role clarity and (b) social integration.

Study 2

Sample and Procedure

We collected data from a machine tool company. With the exception of the eight highest ranking managers, all of the employees (227) were included in the study. Our interviews with the company managers indicated that these employees performed skilled work and that feedback seeking was relevant to their work performance.

We conducted two waves of surveys with a 3-month time lag. In the first wave, respondents reported on demographics and on feedback seeking. The second wave survey had two components: The first component involved employees reporting on role clarity and social integration, and the second involved the direct supervisors rating the employees' job performance. The measures for role clarity, social integration, and job performance were translated into Chinese following the translation and back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). All of the items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The questionnaires were sent out and returned through the HR manager. The participants completed the questionnaires in their own time and returned them in sealed envelopes. The participants were informed that their responses would be used for research purposes only and would be kept strictly confidential. They were assured that no one in their company would have access to their responses. Each participant received a token gift for their participation. We received 186 valid responses after two waves of surveys, representing an 82% response rate.

Measures

Feedback seeking. We used the feedback-seeking measures developed and validated earlier. The Cronbach's α for self-negative, self-positive, other-negative, and other-positive feedback seeking was .89, .95, .91, and .93, respectively.

Job performance. We measured job performance using the five-item in-role performance scale of Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989). A sample item included: "This employee never

neglects aspects of the job that he/she is obligated to perform." The Cronbach's α for the scale was .89.

Role clarity. We used the six-item scale from Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) to measure role clarity. This scale has been widely used in past studies (Bauer & Green, 1998; Morrison, 1993). A sample item included: "I know what my responsibilities are." The Cronbach's α for the scale was .88.

Social integration. We used the four-item scale from Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller (2000). A sample item included: "I get along with the people I work with very well." The Cronbach's α for the scale was .91.

To check the discriminant validity, we subjected feedback seeking, job performance, role clarity, and social integration to a CFA. The seven-factor model had a good fit to the data: χ^2 = 1,268.52, p < .01; RMSEA = .07; NNFI = .96; CFI = .96; IFI = .96. In accordance with our approach in Study 1, we compared the seven-factor model to three alternative models. None of the alternative models achieved an acceptable fit.

Control variables. We controlled for age, gender, education, rank, and organizational tenure following prior research (e.g., Ali & Davies, 2003; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Older employees accumulate experience and wisdom that help social integration and job performance. They tend to better regulate their moods and behaviors, which should help social integration. Education helps build human capital that benefits job performance. Longer tenure enables employees to better understand roles and expectations in an organization. As tenure in an organization increases, employees develop a support network and tacit knowledge that benefit their integration and job performance. Finally, higher ranked employees should be more capable (if promotion is based on merit) and understand norms and expectations better. Education was measured as two categories (1 = bachelor's degree or above, 0 = high school or below). Rank had three categories (junior employee, supervisor/technician, and middle manager or above) and were dummy-coded. Age (M = 37.8, SD = 7.70) was measured in years and organizational tenure (M = 126.55, SD = 90.80) in months. Eighty percent of the respondents were male, and 59% had a bachelor's degree or above.

Results

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations. In this study, each supervisor rated an average of 5.33 subordinates. There were 10 cases in which each supervisor rated one subordinate only. We removed the 10 cases and used the remaining sample (n = 176) for further analysis. We followed Bliese (2000) to conduct one-way random-effect analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with supervisors as the independent variable and employee job performance, role clarity, and social integration as the dependent variables. The intraclass correlation coefficient ICC(1) was .52, .09, and .04 for in-role performance (F = 6.89, p < .01), role clarity (F = 1.54, p < .05), and social integration (F = 1.21, ns), respectively. The results indicated nonindependence of the data (especially for in-role performance ratings), and thus, random coefficient modeling (RCM; also called hierarchical linear modeling) was used to test the hypotheses. To account for the nesting effect, we allowed a random intercept. We

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations—Study 2

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age (in years)	37.80	7.70	—												
2. Gender (1 = *male*)	0.80	0.40	.03	—											
3. Education: bachelor's degree and above	0.59	0.49	-.17	-.20	—										
4. Rank: junior employee	0.59	0.49	-.52	-.23	.04	—									
5. Rank: supervisor/technician	0.25	0.44	.15	.14	-.02	-.70	—								
6. Organizational tenure (in months)	126.55	90.80	.77	-.02	-.23	-.46	.17	—							
7. Self-negative feedback seeking	5.00	1.15	-.09	.14	-.11	-.03	-.01	-.17	—						
8. Self-positive feedback seeking	4.08	1.34	-.09	.07	-.14	.03	.06	-.15	.68	—					
9. Other-negative feedback seeking	3.82	1.35	.03	.10	-.14	-.16	.05	.01	.37	.46	—				
10. Other-positive feedback seeking	4.36	1.34	.05	.07	-.21	-.12	.04	.01	.58	.58	.71	—			
11. In-role performance	5.87	0.79	.17	-.25	-.08	-.13	.21	.13	.17	-.17	-.02	.15	—		
12. Role clarity	5.76	0.82	.31	-.05	-.09	-.22	.10	.22	.22	.07	.00	.12	.22	—	
13. Social integration	5.83	0.89	.13	-.05	.03	-.13	.11	.07	.19	.11	.13	.18	.23	.63	—

Note: $N = 186$. An absolute value of correlation $\geq .14$ is significant at the $p < .05$ level. An absolute value of correlation $\geq .18$ is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 7
Random Coefficient Modeling Results—Study 2

| | Employee work outcomes | | | | | |
| | Job performance | | Role clarity | | Social integration | |
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Step 1						
Age (in years)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)**	.03 (.01)**	.02 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Gender (1 = *male*)	−.26 (.14)	−.28 (.14)*	−.14 (.17)	−.20 (.16)	−.20 (.19)	−.25 (.18)
Education: bachelor's degree and above	.03 (.11)	.05 (.11)	−.03 (.14)	−.02 (.13)	.08 (.15)	.14 (.15)
Rank: junior employee	.12 (.18)	.23 (.18)	−.37 (.23)	−.22 (.23)	−.15 (.25)	.04 (.26)
Rank: supervisor/technician	.36 (.18)*	.45 (.18)*	−.17 (.22)	−.05 (.22)	.11 (.24)	.23 (.24)
Organizational tenure (in months)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Step 2						
Self-negative feedback seeking		.12 (.06)*		.24 (.08)**		.18 (.09)*
Self-positive feedback seeking		−.13 (.05)**		−.08 (.06)		−.08 (.07)
Other-negative feedback seeking		−.06 (.05)		−.07 (.06)		.05 (.07)
Other-positive feedback seeking		.11 (.05)*		.05 (.07)		.06 (.08)
Pseudo R-square		.07		.04		.02

Note: N = 176. Table includes unstandardized coefficients. The standard errors are reported in parentheses.
*p < .05.
**p < .01.

conducted the RCM analyses using the Nonlinear and Linear Mixed Effects (NLME) program for S-Plus and R written by Pinheiro and Bates (2000).

The results, as reported in Table 7, indicated that self-negative feedback seeking was positively related to job performance ($\gamma = .12$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 4 was thus supported. In addition, self-positive feedback seeking was negatively related to job performance ($\gamma = -.13$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 5. Other-positive feedback seeking was positively related to job performance ($\gamma = .11$, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 6. Results also indicated that self-negative feedback seeking was positively related to role clarity ($\gamma = .24$, $p < .01$) and social integration ($\gamma = .18$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 7 was also supported. Self-positive feedback seeking was not significantly related to role clarity ($\gamma = -.08$, *ns*) and social integration ($\gamma = -.08$, *ns*). Hence, Hypothesis 8 was not supported. We also ran analyses without the controls. Significance test results for the hypotheses remained the same.

General Discussion

In this study, we developed a two-dimensional typology of feedback seeking based on goal orientation theory and examined the influences of the resulting four types of feedback seeking on employee work outcomes. The four types of feedback seeking were empirically distinct from each other in the four samples. Furthermore, they demonstrated different

relationships with goal orientation and employee work outcomes, supporting the validity of the typology.

Specifically, a learning orientation was positively related to self-negative and other-positive feedback seeking. Although not hypothesized, a learning orientation was also positively related to self-positive feedback seeking. This result is in line with the argument that self-positive feedback seeking may reveal opportunities to build on and broaden one's skills for those with a learning orientation. Nevertheless, the positive relationship with self-positive feedback seeking was not as strong as that with self-negative feedback seeking, suggesting that self-negative feedback seeking serves the purpose of competence improvement better than self-positive feedback seeking. Consistent with goal orientation theory, a performance-approach orientation was positively related to self-positive and other-negative feedback seeking.

An unexpected finding was that a performance-avoidance orientation was not significantly related to other-negative and self-positive feedback seeking. This may be related to the relatively long tenure of the employees studied. In Study 1, the average employee had worked in the organization for more than 3.5 years. A performance-avoidance orientation may be related to self-positive and other-negative feedback seeking early on in the organizational entry stage. Over time, individuals with a performance-avoidance orientation may lose the motivation to seek such information because it is less likely to obtain self-positive and other-negative information for a positive comparison due to gradual deterioration in performance. The cost of feedback seeking, however, remains the same or even increases, as it is more difficult to get such information for a positive comparison. As a result, the goal of ego protection by seeking such information is less likely to be achieved.

Overall, our empirical findings provided some support for the utility of the two-dimensional typology in predicting employee outcomes. All types of feedback seeking except other-negative feedback seeking were significantly related to in-role performance. Because job performance is the ultimate criterion in which managers are interested, the results regarding in-role performance provided good support to the utility of the typology. However, self-positive feedback seeking was not negatively related to role clarity as we hypothesized. On the one hand, self-positive feedback seeking impedes the learning of desirable role behavior that has not yet been demonstrated. On the other hand, it confirms and thus clarifies to employees the positive role behavior that has already been demonstrated. Similarly, seeking self-positive feedback impedes the adjustments necessary for social integration but clarifies and reinforces existing desirable behavior.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study makes fundamental conceptual and empirical contributions to the areas of feedback seeking and goal orientation, respectively. First, we developed a new conceptual typology of feedback seeking, a standalone theoretical contribution of this study to the feedback-seeking literature. Previous research has exclusively concentrated on self-focused feedback. Because peers play important roles in the workplace, peer-focused feedback seeking should be included. The nature of such feedback is also important. Our typology considers both the self–other and the positive–negative dimensions and thus simultaneously expands and refines previous conceptualization of feedback seeking. Empirically, the typology and its associated findings enrich current understandings of the effect of feedback

seeking on job performance. It suggests that self-negative feedback seeking has a positive influence, whereas self-positive feedback seeking has a negative effect on job performance. The effect of feedback seeking would have been blurred if the nature of feedback sought had not been made clear. Moreover, other-positive feedback seeking was positively related to in-role performance, whereas other-negative feedback seeking was not, indicating that other-focused feedback information is useful for the focal employee's job performance depending on the nature of such information. The results regarding other-focused feedback seeking fill an important knowledge gap in the literature and again highlight the importance of the nature of feedback seeking. Our understanding of other-focused feedback seeking would have been missed if it had not been conceptualized and measured in this study. The implication is that combining both the nature and foci of feedback seeking is critical for understanding the impact of feedback seeking on job performance.

Second, this study advances the goal orientation approach to feedback seeking. Although prior research has examined the effect of goal orientation on feedback seeking, we advance this line of research by conceptualizing the expanded and refined four types of feedback seeking and by empirically examining their relationships with goal orientation. Rather than looking at feedback seeking generally, the focus was on the important relationship between the refined typology and goal orientation. For example, although a performance-approach orientation enhances (self-focused) feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015), we show that it enhances self-positive, but not self-negative, feedback seeking. Research linking goal orientation and feedback seeking would generate varied findings (as seen in prior studies) if the distinction between positive and negative feedback seeking is not clearly made. Moreover, we extend the scope of the goal orientation approach to feedback seeking to include other-focused feedback seeking. By doing so, we fill an important knowledge gap in the literature. The expanded body of knowledge suggests that a learning orientation is positively related to other-positive feedback seeking, whereas a performance-approach orientation is positively related to other-negative feedback seeking.

Third, this study offers a potential explanation for the mixed findings of previous studies. For example, Ashford and Tsui (1991) point out that the existing evidence is conflicting on the issue of whether individuals tend to seek positive or negative feedback. A learning orientation is more likely to prompt self-negative feedback seeking, whereas a performance-approach orientation is more likely to prompt self-positive feedback seeking. Because both orientations exist in individuals but to varying degrees, we may observe mixed results. Similarly, Brown et al. (2001) point out that research on the effects of traits (e.g., self-esteem) on feedback seeking is mixed. Self-esteem may prompt more or less feedback seeking depending on whether the feedback sought is positive or negative. Findings regarding the effects of feedback seeking on job performance have also been mixed (Anseel et al., 2015). Our findings suggest that self-negative and self-positive feedback seeking have opposite effects on job performance. When the nature of the feedback sought is not made clear in measurement, respondents may interpret it differently, leading to the possibility of mixed results.

Finally, our typology can potentially open a new stream of research that refines and extends empirical research on the antecedents and consequences of feedback seeking. As this study has revealed, self-negative and self-positive feedback seeking have different consequences, and other-positive and other-negative feedback seeking have differential effects on job performance. Future research may examine other outcomes using the typology developed

in this study. For example, the feedback-seeking typology in this study may help predict employee creativity. The componential model of creativity (Amabile, 1988) suggests that domain-relevant knowledge and creativity-relevant processes (e.g., divergent thinking) enhance creativity. It follows that self-negative feedback and other-positive feedback may facilitate creative performance by improving employees' job knowledge and expanding the set of cognitive pathways that they possess.

Practical Implications

The feedback-seeking typology and associated findings enable managers to be more targeted when striving to enhance employee job performance. For example, although managers and employees alike may feel uncomfortable with negative feedback, it is necessary for managers to give and for employees to seek such feedback so that employees can perform better. Managers should also encourage employees to focus more on self-negative feedback seeking. To facilitate such behavior, managers should try to foster a safe environment or culture to encourage improvement. For example, managers are advised to start self-negative feedback seeking (e.g., "how do I impede your success?") with themselves. This not only helps managers to improve their own job performance but also creates the psychological safety (i.e., it is OK to admit failures and learn from it) for employees to seek self-negative feedback. Managers should also encourage other-positive feedback seeking that enables employees to learn from each other. To facilitate such behavior, managers should try to foster a learning environment or culture. In particular, managers should start other-positive feedback seeking with themselves. Employees are more likely to follow when they see such managerial behaviors.

Similarly, employees themselves, if they want to succeed, should also seek self-negative feedback, however unpleasant or difficult this may be. To enhance role clarity and social integration, managers and employees should focus more on cultivating self-negative feedback-seeking behavior. Employees are likely to be more willing to seek self-negative feedback when they see the benefits of such actions. Managers can achieve this by helping employees (e.g., offering encouragement and concrete advice for improvement) when they seek self-negative feedback. As employees see their performance improve, they will be more willing to seek self-negative feedback.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that suggest some future directions for research. First, we did not establish causality despite the time-lagged design. Goal orientation, as conceptualized and measured in this study, is a relative stable trait. Previous studies have found that goal orientation is quite stable for a period of 3 to 4 months, as in our study (Payne et al., 2007; VandeWalle, 1997). Feedback seeking, in contrast, refers to specific behavior. The reverse causality (i.e., from feedback seeking to goal orientation) is thus less likely in our context. Furthermore, reverse causality is less likely for the relationship between feedback seeking and work outcomes. If job performance causes self-negative feedback seeking, then we would have observed a negative relationship between them, because strong performers should have less negative information to seek and a lower need for such information. Our argument is that self-negative feedback seeking provides both the motivation and diagnostic

information for enhancing performance and thus has a positive relationship with future performance. Similarly, if role clarity caused self-negative feedback seeking in our study, then we would have observed a negative relationship between them. Consistent with our argument and the study design, we found a positive relationship between self-negative feedback seeking at Time 1 and role clarity at Time 2. A similar reasoning applies to our other significant findings.

Second, we conducted the study in the Chinese context, which raises the issue of the applicability of our typology to other contexts. It is of course possible that culture does not affect feedback seeking; employees from any and every culture should have some interest in self-focused performance information. Moreover, because employees, whatever their cultural background, need to maintain social relatedness with others, they should have some interest in peer-focused performance information. Employees have an interest in both positive and negative information, regardless of culture. The four types of feedback seeking are thus likely to be generalizable to other cultures.

However, cultures may vary in the degree to which each type of feedback seeking is used and its effectiveness. Employees from the Chinese culture that emphasizes interdependence may seek and be influenced by peer information to a greater extent than those from a culture that emphasizes independence (Iyengar & Brockner, 2001). Because of the Chinese cultural norm of protecting others' face and maintaining harmony (Westwood, 1997) and the cultural orientation toward self-improvement (Bailey, Chen, & Dou, 1997; Gelfand et al., 2007), Chinese employees may seek other-positive more than other-negative information, and self-negative more than self-positive information. Supervisors and peers alike may view other-positive and self-negative feedback seeking positively, making such behavior more effective in the Chinese context. Future research should examine our feedback-seeking typology in other cultures.

We collected data from one organization for Study 1 and another one for Study 2. The advantage of this approach is that we could control for organizational-level factors (e.g., policy and culture) that might have affected feedback seeking or employee work outcomes. Future research could replicate the study in other organizations.

Our measure for self-positive feedback seeking covers behaviors of seeking comments or information on areas one does well, but does not specify how specific those comments are. Although the measure allows the possibility of both general and specific comments, we do not know the exact questions that employees raise and how specific they are. In general, the more specific the questions are, the more informative the feedback information they will generate. Moreover, we did not examine moderators for self-positive feedback seeking. It is possible that self-positive feedback seeking may motivate an employee to strive for better performance under a strong promotion focus (i.e., a focus on gain) (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). Future research should examine this potential moderating effect. Furthermore, seeking negative feedback is different from giving negative feedback. For example, those who seek negative feedback may not be defensive about it. However, employees could be defensive and protective when they are given negative feedback. Therefore, the result for the effect of seeking negative feedback may not generalize to giving negative feedback. Finally, the job performance measure in Study 2 captures in-role performance and does not cover creativity or initiative. Future research should examine whether our findings can generalize to creative performance.

Conclusions

Despite its limitations, this study provides the basis for a more refined approach to future work on goal orientation, feedback seeking, and employee work outcomes. It suggests that employees seek self-negative, self-positive, other-negative, and other-positive feedback. These four types of feedback seeking have different effects on employee job performance, role clarity, and social integration. Self-negative and other-positive feedback seeking has the most positive influence on employee job performance. Goal orientation provides a theoretical basis for the four types of feedback seeking. A learning orientation enhances both self-negative and other-positive feedback seeking, whereas a performance-approach orientation enhances both self-positive and other-negative feedback seeking.

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