

## **Antecedents of Feedback Seeking Behaviors: Review of the Feedback Seeking Literature**

**OZGE TAYFUR, PhD**

Hacettepe University

Department of Business Administration

Hacettepe Üniversitesi İ.İ.B.F. İşletme Bölümü, 06800, Beytepe

Ankara-Turkey

### **Abstract**

Receiving feedback once or twice a year is not enough for employees. Employees do not wait for annual performance-reviews as supposed in many years; they actively search for information to decide what goals to pursue, learn what to do for goal attainment, and determine whether goals are achieved. This study aims to address relatively neglected area of feedback literature, which is feedback seeking. The study reviews the literature to understand what instigates feedback seeking behaviors. Firstly, motives derived from organizational behavior theory (i.e., desire for useful information, desire to protect ego; desire to control image) and motives derived from self-theory (i.e., self-verification, enhancement, improvement, assessment) are explained. Secondly, individual and situational factors that activate these motives are discussed. Finally, suggestions are made to both researchers, who want to work about feedback seeking and practitioners who want to make employees more willing to seek feedback.

**Key Words:** Feedback seeking motives, SCENT model,

### ***1. Introduction***

Ambiguity, change, and uncertainty are probably the best words defining today's organizations. Increased competition, rapidly changing technology, and business rules bring about substantial changes with regard to performance standards, and organizational rules (Morrison, 2002). To adapt these changes, employees have no chance but to adapt their behaviors based on the information they are provided with or they obtain (Ashford, 1986). Feedback, which involves information about how others perceive and evaluate an individual's behavior, fulfills different functions. It can serve as a reward and thus stimulates performance or it can serve as a cue useful in regulating behavior appropriately (Payne & Hauty, 1955). No matter how it functions, feedback is an important organizational resource, which helps employees to achieve the performance and motivational outcomes valued by the organization (Ashford & Cummings, 1985).

Realizing its instrumental value, many studies have been conducted to understand the concept of 'feedback' (e.g., Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Larson, 1984). In these studies, mainly the cognitive and affective processes related to feedback giving were investigated. However, as Ashford and Cummings (1983) states, individuals are not just passive recipients of information. They actively seek feedback to reduce ambiguity about appropriate behaviors and to self-assess their progress. Focusing solely on performance appraisals and assuming that employees wait for annual performance review to assess themselves are no longer valid presumptions. To have complete picture about feedback process, we need to understand multiple and various ways that employees seek and use feedback in their everyday work lives (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003).

After the criticism of Ashford and Cummings (1983) and their studies, researchers directed their attention to feedback-seeking concept. To this date, many studies have been conducted to explore the meaning, antecedents and consequences of feedback seeking behavior (e.g. Butler, 1993; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). In majority of the studies, the feedback seeking behaviors of people have been investigated in organizational settings because organizational settings enable researchers to manipulate or measure the factors that affect feedback seeking. Moreover, its contributions to several outcomes such as performance and employee learning make studying feedback behavior in organizations viable. This study aims to uncover feedback seeking mechanisms in real life organizations.

Since motives are argued to be important determinant of behaviors (e.g., Ajzen, 1991), investigating motives is thought to be important for understanding why employees engage particular feedback seeking behavior. Motives for seeking feedback, however, may depend on various factors such as feedback sign (i.e., whether the seeker expects feedback to be favorable or unfavorable), tolerance for ambiguity, need for closure and achievement. That is why, this study takes into account concepts such as leader-member exchange, goal orientation and self efficacy and investigates how they affect the motives for seeking information and the means selected for this purpose.

Besides motives, this study examines the behaviors exhibited by employees while seeking feedback. In a way, the study combines the attitudinal side of feedback seeking with the behavioral side of the feedback seeking by showing the linkage between motives and certain feedback seeking behaviors. Studies investigating the feedback seeking concept generally focused on either attitudinal side (motives) or behavioral side of feedback seeking, but not both. This study is hoped to provide complete picture about feedback seeking phenomena by mentioning about the linkages between motives and behaviors. Furthermore, by focusing on feedback seeking methods other than the direct inquiry and monitoring, the study hopefully contributes the relevant literature and set direction for the future research. The model presented in the paper provides hypotheses that could be tested in the future.

In addition to providing a summary of findings in feedback seeking literature, this study hopefully provides important insights to practitioners. They benefit from this review by understanding which motives are related to which feedback seeking behaviors and how occurrence of these behaviors can be increased through organizational means, such as organizational climate and policies. For example, understanding how self-enhancing motives are related to the frequency of the feedback seeking may give practitioners cues about how they can manipulate the organizational climate to make employees more willing to seek feedback. Moreover, understanding how individual differences, such as goal orientation, and self efficacy, affect feedback seeking behaviors may enable organizations to acknowledge why some employees are more willing to seek feedback and ask questions about their performances while others are reluctant to seek feedback and only monitor their environment to gather information about their performance.

However it is noteworthy to mention that feedback seeking motives and behaviors may be affected by many factors other than the factors discussed in this review. For example, need for closure or self esteem may change the magnitude of relationship between goal orientation and motives by making people more or less receptive to feedback. Since it is impossible to examine all possible antecedents of feedback seeking behaviors, this study considers only the most prominent ones.

## ***2. The Concept of Feedback Seeking***

People live in an environment which is characterized by ambiguity, change, and uncertainty. To reduce the tension created by ambiguity and uncertainty, people try to gather information either by asking questions to other people or monitoring the environment (Ashford, 1986). In this respect, information seeking seems to have an instrumental value for individuals who want to clarify the uncertainties and make sense of things happening around them. Realizing its importance, many researchers conducted studies about information seeking concept, which includes feedback seeking concept as well (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Morrison, 2002; Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002). Since the aim of this study was to investigate the feedback seeking concept within organizations, the information seeking concept, which is broader than the feedback seeking concept, is not included in this review.

The interest about employee feedback seeking started with the article written by Ashford and Cummings (1983). In this article, Ashford and Cummings defined feedback seeking as “*conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behaviors for attaining valued end states*” (p. 378). To clarify this definition, the researchers listed the situations in which employees are more likely to seek feedback. They proposed that individuals are more likely to seek feedback to feel themselves competent (achieve sense of competency), to reduce uncertainty about goals and to learn which behaviors are required to achieve the goals and how their behaviors are being assessed by others. After Ashford and Cummings’s (1983) article, other researchers started to investigate the antecedents and consequences of feedback seeking behaviors. In these studies, researchers either investigated attitudinal aspects (the motives for seeking feedback) (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Battman, 1988) or behavioral aspects of feedback seeking concept (from whom to seek feedback, in what frequency to seek feedback, etc.) (e.g., Fedor, Mathieson, & Adams, 1990; Larson, 1989).

In a number of studies, both attitudinal and behavioral factors were considered to see whether certain attitudes were related to certain feedback seeking behaviors (e.g., Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). However, both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of feedback seeking need to be examined closely to better understand the feedback seeking mechanism.

## **2.1. Attitudinal / Motivational Aspects of Feedback Seeking**

Because feedback provides important information about goal attainment, performance level and likely rewards, people often proactively seek it from others rather than passively wait for it. In this active information search, however, people may have different motives. Some people may seek feedback in order to make others aware of their good performance; whereas others may seek it in order to understand their mistakes and obtain diagnostic information. These different motives may affect when (after good or bad performance), from whom (from supervisor or peers), and how people search for feedback (by asking questions or monitoring). Realizing this fact, many researchers first tried to understand what induces people to search for (or not search for) feedback. In their studies, researchers gave different names to feedback seeking motives, but they conceptualized these motives quite similarly.

### **2.1.1. Motives Mentioned By Ashford and Cummings**

In their studies, Ashford and Cummings (1983) and later Morrison and Bies (1991) mentioned about three different motives that may instigate certain feedback seeking behaviors. These are *desire for useful information*, which is related to instrumental value of information; *desire to protect ego and self esteem from the threat of negative feedback*, which is more related to the self protection motives of people; and *desire to control the impressions of others*, which involves both defensive and assertive impression management desires.

#### **Desire for Useful Information Motive:**

According to Ashford and Cummings (1983; cited in Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002), individuals are motivated to seek feedback from their supervisors, peers or subordinates because feedback can give information about goals worth pursuing, likely rewards associated with goal attainment, behaviors most relevant to goal attainment, and the evaluation of the performance. Because of its instrumental value, today, many researchers (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Battman, 1988) claim that people have a desire for obtaining useful information and this desire increases their propensity of feedback seeking. Studies conducted so far have supported this claim. For example, in one study by Ashford and Cummings (1985), individuals experiencing high job involvement and role ambiguity reported a higher desire for obtaining useful information and more frequent feedback seeking as compared to other individuals not experiencing such feelings. This and many other studies (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995) focusing on motives for seeking feedback found the evidence of desire for useful information as a major motive in feedback seeking.

Desire for useful information, is however labeled differently by researchers. Instrumental motive, uncertainty reduction (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Brown et al., 2001), goal achievement (e.g., Renn & Fedor, 2001), performance enhancement (e.g., Klich & Feldman, 1992) and desire for feedback are commonly used labels for desire for useful information motive. Although used interchangeably, these labels have different connotations. While desire for reducing role uncertainty takes precedence in “uncertainty reduction motive”, reaching goals and increasing performance takes precedence in “goal achievement” and “performance enhancement motives”.

#### **Desire to Protect Ego Motive:**

Although accurate self-relevant information is instrumental for reducing uncertainty, attaining goals and desired outcomes, individuals still seem to prefer favorable information about themselves to maintain a positive self view (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). With this self-enhancing motive, individuals may avoid (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983), distort (e.g., Morrison & Cummings, 1992), or deemphasize the value of feedback (e.g., Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003) if they feel that feedback can hurt their pride and ego. Number of studies demonstrated the role of ego-protection motive on feedback seeking. For example, Northcraft and Ashford (1990; cited in Ashforth et al., 2007) found that individuals with low performance expectations sought less feedback compared to individuals with high performance expectations, which could only be explained with these individuals' desire to protect self image or self-worth from negative feedback. Similarly self-presentation cost was found to be negatively related to the frequency of feedback seeking behavior in two different studies (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992).

As in desire for useful information motive, researchers conceptualized desire to protect ego motive with different labels. This motive is also called as “ego-defense” (Ashford, 1986), “ego-inflicting” (e.g., Ang & Cummings, 1994), “self-concept threat” (e.g., Waldman and Atwater, 2005), “self-esteem protection” (e.g., Abraham, Morrison & Burnett, 2006), and “ego-protection” (e.g., Northcraft & Ashforth, 1990) motives. Despite abundant number of labels used in the literature, the underlying premise of this motive (i.e., desire to protect ego motive) is that people refrain from seeking performance-feedback when the feedback is potentially threatening to their ego (Anseel, Lievens, & Levy, 2007).

### **Desire to Control Impressions of Others**

This third motive mentioned in the literature is related to image concerns. Ashford and Cummings (1983) claimed that desire to control impressions in the eyes of others may lead people to engage (or not engage) in feedback seeking behaviors. As being surrounded by peers, supervisors, subordinates and clients, people are under pressure to portray a favorable image to these people. These image concerns may make people willing to or reluctant to seek feedback and impression management could influence the frequency, timing, and target of the feedback seeking behaviors as shown in previous studies (e.g., Tuckey et al., 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997).

In the reviewed literature, impression management has been conceptualized under two categories as assertive and defensive impression management. According to this classification, people having defensive impression motives are thought to avoid creating negative impression. This avoidance was found to be related to increased nervousness and anxiety in the feedback receiving and seeking process (Northcraft & Ashford, 1992). For people having this motive, public delivery of feedback pose significant risks because of the possible negative feedback that may be received. Studies assessing such concerns have shown that public requests for feedback (e.g., Northcraft & Ashford, 1992; Levy et al., 1995) and public delivery of feedback (e.g., Northcraft & Ashford, 1990) reduce feedback seeking, especially when performance expectations were low (Tuckey et al., 2002) People having defensive impression motives were more likely to inhibit their explicit feedback seeking activities when public feedback was given (Northcraft, & Ashford, 1990).

In their review article, Ashford, Blant and VandeWalle (2003) asserted that in public contexts, individuals compare the instrumental or ego benefits of feedback with potential image costs. According to Ashford et al. (2003), individuals are quite motivated not to publicly reveal the things that could hurt their image. In other words, when they fear that feedback will damage their images, individuals may sacrifice the instrumental benefits of that feedback (Northcraft & Ashford, 1990, 1992) and avoid feedback.

However, defensive impression management reflects only part of the image considerations. As Morrison and Bies (1991) states, individuals sometimes attempt to enhance their images by seeking positive feedback even if it has no instrumental value. For example, people may seek additional feedback after getting favorable performance-evaluations, or they may seek feedback from those with whom they have a good relationship and certainly give favorable feedback. These assertive impression management tactics may affect from whom, when, and how to seek feedback. For example in one study (Northcraft & Ashford, 1992) people using assertive impression management tactics were found to experience less nervousness and showed increased interest in seeking performance feedback.

### **2.2.2. Motives Proposed By Swann, Pelham and Krull**

Like Ashford and Cummings (1983), Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) also talked about the motives that may instigate feedback seeking behaviors. Though they named these motives differently, their descriptions were quite similar to those of Ashford and Cummings. Modeling the concepts discussed in self literature, Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) mentioned about two motives that might affect feedback seeking behaviors. These motives are *self-enhancement* and *self-verification* motives. According to these researchers, whether people search for favorable or unfavorable feedback depends on their self enhancement and self verification desires. Self enhancement motive is based on the self-enhancement theory, which assumes that all people have a desire to increase their feelings of personal worth. People having self-enhancement motives are expected to increase their feedback seeking efforts when they perform well, decrease their efforts when they perform poorly.

The other motive, which is self-verification motive, is based on self-verification theory. This theory claims that people strive to confirm their self-conceptions, even if those self-conceptions are negative (Lecky, cited in Swann, Seroussi, Giesler, 1992).

People seek subjectively accurate or self-verifying feedback because feedback confirming their self conceptions strengthens their feelings of confidence. People avoid feedback that disconfirms their self-conceptions because such feedback signals these people that they do not know themselves (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989).

These two motives (self-enhancement and self-verification) predict that people with positive self views (i.e., people feeling themselves efficacious) strive to maintain such views (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987) and search for feedback when they expect positive evaluations. People having self-enhancement motive are expected to seek feedback to hear positive evaluations; people having self-verification motive are expected to seek feedback to hear evaluations consistent with their self evaluations. However, these two motives make opposite predictions regarding people evaluating themselves negatively. Self-verification theorists assume that people evaluating themselves negatively prefer negative feedback because such feedback is predictable and consistent with their self-evaluations. On the other hand, self enhancement theorists assume that such people avoid negative feedback and prefer positive ones because they want to think well of themselves (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, and Gaines, 1987).

Studies investigating this controversy reached inconclusive results, which made one motive not superior to other one. Some studies showed that desire to self verify could influence the way people interpret feedback and their desire for seeking feedback. In these studies, people were found to ask for feedback that confirms their self views (e.g. Coyne, Kessler, Tal, Turnbull, Wortman, Greden, 1987; Swann; Krull & Pelham, 1989; Swann & Read, 1991) and tend to regard confirming feedback as more accurate, plausible and diagnostic (e.g., Swann, Griffin, Predmore & Gaines, 1987). Despite the supporting evidence, accepting self-verification motive as the sole determinant of feedback seeking behavior does not seem right. For example, Moreland and Sweeney (1984; cited in Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987) found that people with low self-esteem generally regarded positive feedback as more self-descriptive than negative feedback. According to this finding, it is reasonable to expect low self esteem people to seek positive feedback and avoid negative ones, as proposed by self-enhancement theorists. Considering these conflicting results, Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) claimed that it was more reasonable to expect these two motives to be functional. Accordingly, people are expected to be motivated for self-enhancement and self-verification and they work to satisfy both motives when possible. The researchers tested this assumption with three studies. They found that people who sought favorable feedback pertaining to their positive self-conceptions sought unfavorable feedback pertaining to their negative self-conceptions. In these three studies, all people preferred to seek feedback regarding their positive self views (consistent with self-enhancement motive), yet, this preference did not reflect itself on feedback seeking behaviors. It was found that when people wanted to seek feedback regarding their negative self views, they were willing to get unfavorable feedback, not favorable one.

The studies of Swann and his colleagues (i.e., Swann, Pelham & Krull, 1989; Swann et al, 1987; Swann, Seroussi, Giesler, 1992) suggested that both self verification and self enhancement motives might affect the feedback seeking behaviors of people. The self enhancement motive mentioned in Swann and colleagues' studies resembles the desire for ego protection and assertive impression management motives proposed by Ashford and Cummings (1983). In fact, this motive seems to combine ego protection and assertive impression management motives. The other motive, self verification motive, does not resemble any of the motives proposed by Ashford and Cummings.

### 2.2.3. Motives Proposed by Anseel, Lieveens and Levy and SCENT MODEL

When discussing the motives for seeking feedback, Anseel, Lieveens and Levy (2007) mentioned about *self-assessment* and *self-improvement* motives in addition to self-verification and self-enhancement motives. According to the researchers, people having **self-assessment** motive want to obtain diagnostic information that can reduce uncertainty about themselves. These people are interested in neither enhancing their image or ego nor confirming their beliefs about themselves. They are only interested in clarifying their self- concept and answering self-related questions in a more accurate way therefore they seek diagnostic information without considering whether this information is consistent with their self-evaluations or enhances their image and ego.

The other motive, which is self-improvement motive resembles “desire for useful information motive” mentioned above. According to Anseel et al (2007), people having self-improvement motive are motivated to develop their traits, abilities and skills and seek for genuine development and betterment of self.

In the SCENT model proposed by Sedikides & Strube (1997) and later applied by Anseel et al (2007) for feedback seeking, four self-related motives, which are self-assessment, self-improvement, self-enhancement and self-verification are argued to guide people's behaviors. Researchers using SCENT model acknowledge that these motives could exist at the same time; yet which motive guides feedback seeking behavior depends on individual and situational characteristics. For example, if people are expected to explain, justify and defend their self-evaluations to other people, in other words, they are held accountable for their self evaluations, their self evaluations tend to be lower (Sedikides et al., 2002). These could attach more importance to evaluate themselves in a more accurate way, which could reduce self-enhancement motive and make self-assessment motive more salient.

Though SCENT model provides more comprehensive explanation of motives behind feedback seeking attempts and resolves the conflicting results in the literature, still three motives, desire for useful information, desire to protect ego, desire to control impressions, are accepted as prominent motives in the literature. However it should be noted that aforementioned motives do not directly influence feedback seeking behaviors, rather they influence people's evaluations regarding the cost and value of feedback seeking which affects the timing, target, frequency and method of seeking feedback. Individual and situational factors make particular motive salient, which in turn determines the value and cost of seeking feedback.

## **2.2. Factors Affecting Feedback Seeking Process**

As indicated before, employees could be affected by several factors when deciding to search for performance-related feedback. Individual, interpersonal, organizational factors could make employees willing to or reluctant to seek feedback. Apart from these factors, factors related to feedback message (e.g., feedback sign) and feedback-giver (e.g., credibility and trustworthiness) could intensify desire (or avoidance) for seeking feedback. Individual, interpersonal, organizational and message-related factors could affect motives for seeking feedback or act as a moderator between motive and behavior linkage. In the literature, various factors are argued to affect feedback process. Since it is not possible to mention about all these factors, only the prominent factors cited in the literature are discussed in subsequent section.

### **2.2.1. The Effect of Goal Orientation**

Goal orientation could be defined as an orientation toward different types of goals in achievement situations (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; cited in Tuckey et al, 2002). Many studies identified two major types of goals and uncovered the characteristics of the people having these goals. In one of the early studies, Nicholls (1984) compared ego-involved individuals with task-involved ones. Accordingly, ego-involved individuals evaluate their ability by comparing their performance and effort with those of others, whereas task involved individuals evaluate their ability considering the progress they made (i.e., gains toward mastery of the task). In the later studies, Dweck (1986) made a distinction between learning and performance goals. People with learning goals strive to increase their competence and/or learn something new and performance goals, while people with performance goals strive to demonstrate competence or avoid negative judgments.

Although in majority of the studies goal orientation has been operationalized as learning and performance orientation, in more recent studies (e.g. VandeWalle, 1997), goal orientation has been operationalized as a three dimensional construct. In this new conceptualization, performance goals are divided into two components: *approach and avoidance*. People sometimes strive to prove their ability in comparison to others and attain favorable judgments of their competence (VandeWalle, 2001). In that case, they are said to show performance-prove orientation (the approach component). Yet, rather than trying to prove themselves, people sometimes refrain from taking the opinions of other people in order not to display their incompetence and take negative judgments from them. People showing reluctance to hear negative information are argued to have performance-avoid orientation. In this new conceptualization, performance goal orientation is divided into two distinct parts considering the motives of people (defensive motives to protect image and assertive motives to enhance image).

Regardless of the conceptualization used, understanding goal orientations of people is important because goal orientation affects how individuals interpret and respond to achievement situations. According to Dweck and Leggett (1998), individuals with performance-goal orientation generally have an "entity theory" about their ability. They regard their abilities as something fixed, unchangeable and uncontrollable.



Yet, individuals with learning goal orientation generally have an “*incremental theory*” about their ability meaning that they view ability as a malleable attribute that can be developed through effort, training, and experience (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). This distinction affects not only the persistence and efforts of individuals but also their perceived need for feedback for correcting mistakes and improving abilities.

VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) claim that learning and performance goal orientations may explain why individuals differently weigh the cost and the value of feedback. Because performance-oriented individuals view showing effort as an indication of low ability, they may regard the feedback seeking efforts, especially the efforts for seeking diagnostic feedback as an indication of low ability. For performance-oriented people, people having enough ability would not need the guidance of feedback (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). For these people, the self-presentation cost of feedback seeking is high because feedback may draw attention to deficiencies. As opposed to performance goal oriented people, learning goal oriented people see feedback useful for improving performance and developing ability (VandeWalle, 1997). For these people, feedback seeking has a high instrumental value because the feedback received can indicate how to change their behavior to improve performance.

VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) tested the influence of goal orientation on feedback seeking behaviors of students with a longitudinal field study and a scenario study. The results of these two studies demonstrated positive relationship between learning-goal orientation and feedback seeking and negative relationship between performance-goal orientation and feedback seeking. Perceived cost and value of feedback seeking were found to mediate the relationship between goal orientation and feedback seeking efforts. Based on these findings, VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) concluded that likelihood of feedback seeking increased as learning goal orientation became greater than the performance-goal orientation. Like VandeWalle and Cummings (1997), Tuckey et al. (2002) also tried to uncover the factors affecting the frequency of feedback seeking. Rather than asking value and cost perceptions of participants, the researchers tried to investigate the role of motives on goal orientation and feedback seeking linkage. More specifically, they hypothesized that the motives (desire for useful information, desire for protecting ego and desire for controlling image) mediate the relationship between goal orientation and feedback seeking. They claimed that learning oriented individuals should show a strong desire for useful information because they are focused on improving performance and willing to exert effort to do so. In contrast, performance oriented people are less likely to believe that useful information can be obtained because they see ability as fixed (Tuckey et al., 2002).

In short, individuals seek feedback for different reasons: Learning oriented individuals may seek feedback to enhance personal development, whereas performance-oriented seek feedback to prove their abilities to others. Goal orientation could affect both motives of feedback seeking and value of feedback.

## **2. 2. 2.The Effect of Self Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as ‘*people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances*’ (Bandura, 1997, p. 391). Previous studies (e.g., Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Locke, Frederick, Lee, & Bobko, 1984) demonstrated that self-efficacy affects every aspect of people’s lives- whether they think positively / productively or in a self-debilitating manner; how well they motivate themselves and persist when faced with adversities /difficulties and how they make important decisions. In the literature, cost of feedback seeking is thought to be higher for someone with low efficacy because negative feedback could hurt that person’s ego further. However, the results previous studies provided mixed results concerning the role of self-efficacy. For example, Brown, Ganesan, Challagalla (2001) demonstrated that employees with high self-efficacy were able to effectively use the combination of inquiry and monitoring to clarify role expectations whereas employees with low self-efficacy were not. The findings of this study suggest that high self-efficacy enable effective self-regulation through proactive feedback seeking. In another study (Gruman et al, 2006), high self efficacy was found to be related to uncertainty reduction motive thus increased levels of feedback seeking. However, in substantial number of studies (e.g., Brown et al, 2001; Renn & Fedor, 2001), the direct effect of self-efficacy on feedback seeking behaviors was found to be inconclusive. Although direct effect is questionable, the moderating effect of self-efficacy on feedback seeking seems to be noteworthy. Study conducted by Moon and Levy (2000; cited in Anseel et al, 2007) showed that self efficacy moderated the relationship between goal orientation and feedback seeking behaviors.

Employees with low performance orientation and low efficacy exhibited feedback seeking behaviors less frequently; while employees with low performance orientation and high efficacy were more eager to seek feedback.

### 2.2.3. The Effect of Other Individual Difference Variables

Other than self-efficacy and goal orientation, individual difference variables like need for achievement, approval and autonomy, masculinity, public self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation were found to influence feedback seeking process. In different studies, people who are sensitive about how they appear to others (i.e., people with high public self-consciousness) want to protect their ego, which shapes how and how often they seek feedback. As being concerned about achieving something, people having high need for achievement have a tendency to seek diagnostic feedback (e.g., Klich & Feldman, 1992; Miller et al., 2005). In addition to these, people scoring high on masculinity (e.g., Miller et al, 2005) and having low tolerance for ambiguity (e.g., Fedor et al, 1992) are found to be more willing to search for feedback.

### 2.2.4. The Effect of Feedback Sign

As indicated before, feedback is valuable because it can be used to reduce uncertainty about how well one is performing, to diagnose performance problems, and to self evaluate one's capabilities (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; cited in Morrison & Cummings, 1992). However in addition to its informational content, feedback has an affective content; consequently, individuals react differently to feedback than to other types of information (Morrison & Cummings, 1992). Some studies found that individuals seek (or avoid) feedback considering the valence of feedback, not considering the content of it (e.g. Ilgen & Hamstra; Johnson & Nawrocki, cited in Morrison & Cummings, 1992). Some individuals tend to avoid negative information about themselves in order to protect their self esteem (e.g., Carver, Antonio, & Scheier, 1985; Sachs, 1982) or purposefully try to obtain positive feedback about themselves in order to enhance their self esteem (e.g., Gruder, 1977) and image.

As Ashford and Cummings (1983) indicated, the desire to seek performance feedback depends in large part on whether the seeker expects the feedback to be favorable. This creates a conflict for individuals who believe they are performing poorly- a conflict between the desire to improve their performance with diagnostic information and the desire to protect their ego and image by avoiding negative information about themselves (Morrison & Cummings, 1992). Studies investigating this conflict yielded mixed results. Some studies found that individuals are motivated most strongly by the desire to obtain diagnostic information about their abilities (e.g., Trope; Trope & Bassock; Trope & Brickman, cited in Morrison & Cummings, 1992); others found that concerns for protecting one's self esteem are more dominant (e.g. Meyer & Starke; Sachs; Swann & Read, cited in Morrison & Cummings, 1992). Despite conflicting results, one can claim that individuals could increase or decrease their feedback search or use more defensive methods such as monitoring or indirect inquiry or aggressive method such as direct inquiry depending on the expected feedback sign.

### 3.4. The Effect of Feedback-Giver Characteristics

The relationship between feedback provider and seeker, feedback-provider's credibility, leadership style and accessibility could activate different motives and influence the frequency and method of feedback seeking. According to the results of previous studies, the quality of relationship between feedback seeker and provider seem to affect feedback-seeking process. In one study, loyalty and respect, which are two key elements of quality leader-member exchange, increased feedback seeking from supervisors (Lee et al, 2005). In other studies, the support given by supervisor (e.g., Williams et al, 1999) and accessibility of feedback-provider (e.g., Vancouver & Morrison, 1995) substantially increased desire for seeking feedback. **Transformational leaders** were also found to induce feedback seeking in organizations (e.g., Madzar, 2001). Apart from the quality of relationship between feedback seeker and provider, the expertise (e.g., Vancouver & Morrison, 1995) and credibility of feedback-provider (e.g. ,Steelman et al, 2004). was found to make people more willing or reluctant to seek feedback.

### *Suggestions*

The concept of feedback seeking is relatively new and rather underdeveloped part of feedback literature. For many years, employees were regarded as "passive recipients of information and their reaction to performance reviews are investigated. Since the last decade, however, researchers directed their attention to understand why and how employees seek feedback.



Most of the time, studies addressed the attitudinal and behavioral side of feedback seeking separately. Although these studies provided invaluable information, more studies combining attitudinal and behavioral sides are needed to clarify which motive triggers which behavior. Besides, despite the voluminous number of studies addressing the individual and situational factors that activate feedback motives, there is limited number of studies looking at interaction of these factors. For example, it is known that learning goal orientation and public delivery feedback affects motives for seeking feedback, yet it is not clear how goal orientation and public delivery of feedback interacts (i.e., whether public delivery of feedback lessens learning-oriented people's desire for feedback). Therefore, researchers are suggested to investigate not only the direct effect but also indirect and interaction effects of situational and individual factors.

Based on the results of previous studies, practitioners are advised to reduce employees' image and ego concerns to make them more willing to seek feedback. Giving feedback in private place and in a constructive way could reduce the impact of negative feedback which is potentially threatening to employee's ego and image.

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