EXPlicating the links between the feedback environment, feedback seeking, and job performance

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EXPLICATING THE LINKS BETWEEN THE FEEDBACK ENVIRONMENT, FEEDBACK SEEKING, AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary feedback researchers have adopted theoretical perspectives in which broad personal characteristics interact with the work environment to influence a more narrow, domain-specific trait (i.e., feedback orientation), which in turn, is thought to affect the extent to which individuals engage in the feedback process and feedback seeking. However, to date empirical studies have not examined whether individual difference variables moderate the effects of the feedback environment. In the present study, the organization’s feedback environment was thought to interact with trait goal orientation to influence feedback orientation, in turn influencing the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior. In addition, the current study assessed the mediating influence of role clarity on the feedback seeking/job performance link and the moderating effects of social skill on the feedback seeking/role clarity relationship. While the primary focus of this study was on the model linking the feedback environment to feedback seeking to impact job performance, this study had a secondary purpose; to more closely investigate the link between the multidimensional constructs of the feedback environment and feedback orientation.

With the exception of the direct link between feedback seeking and job performance, the results support the proposed model. Perceptions of a supportive feedback environment influence employee feedback orientation, which in turn, positively influence feedback seeking behavior. Furthermore, while feedback seeking directly
influenced job performance, role clarity partially mediated this relationship. Moderator analyses indicated that learning goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation moderated the feedback environment/feedback orientation link. Results of the facet-level analyses demonstrated that supervisor feedback quality accounted for more variance in utility, accountability, and social awareness than any other feedback environment subdimension, whereas coworker feedback quality accounted for more variance in utility and social awareness.
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CHAPTER I
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the classic definition, an organization’s feedback environment refers to the job performance information that employees perceive to be available to them (Greller & Herold, 1975; Hanser & Muchinsky, 1978). Recently, this definition has been expanded to include the broad social milieu in which day-to-day feedback exchanges take place (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). Importantly, researchers have since demonstrated significant relationships between the newly-defined feedback environment and numerous employee behaviors and attitudes (Anseel & Lievens, 2006; Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006; Steelman & Levy, 2001; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, in press). However, despite calls by feedback researchers (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Herold & Fedor, 1998; London & Smither, 2002; Morrison, 2002), little research has investigated the intervening mechanisms by which the organization’s feedback environment influences the individual’s feedback-seeking behavior, nor those mechanisms involved in the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance.

Thus, the aim of this study is to develop a model that more clearly delineates the contextual and intra-individual elements involved in the association between the feedback environment and job performance by explicating the links between the feedback
environment and feedback seeking as well as those linking feedback seeking to job performance. An understanding of the nature of how the aforementioned influences impact feedback-seeking behavior, and subsequently job performance, carries with it direct and compelling implications for many organizational practices including training, coaching, and performance management. In the following sections, the rationale underlying the proposed relationships in Figure 1 is briefly outlined.

Furthermore, this study seeks to more closely investigate the link between the two multidimensional constructs of the feedback environment and feedback orientation, one’s overall receptivity to feedback. In this vein, a priori, theoretically-based links are derived between specific subdimensions of the feedback environment and of feedback orientation.
Figure 1. Proposed model linking the feedback environment to job performance through feedback seeking. Note: FE = Feedback Environment; GO = Goal Orientation; FO = Feedback Orientation; FBS = Feedback Seeking; SSKL = Social Skill; RC = Role Clarity; JPERF = Job Performance.
Relating the Feedback Environment to Feedback Seeking

Several studies have now demonstrated that a supportive feedback environment positively influences the extent to which individuals seek performance feedback information (Levy et al., 1995; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker et al., in press; Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999). Furthermore, over the past two decades a large empirical literature has developed indicating that global individual differences also influence the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking (Bennett, Herold, & Ashford, 1990; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams 1992; Herold, Parsons, & Rensvold, 1996; Levy et al., 1995; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000).

For example, a large body of literature indicates that, due to divergent perceptions of values and costs, learning and performance goal orientations represent broad personality variables differentially related to feedback seeking behavior (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Norris-Watts, 2004; Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle, 2003; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, et al., 2000). Briefly, learning goal oriented individuals tend to focus on development and task mastery and respond to challenges with increased effort and feedback seeking (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), whereas persons high in performance goal orientation tend to focus on comparing favorably and avoiding negative judgments and, as such, refrain from seeking feedback to such an extent.

Furthermore, whereas goal orientation can be influenced by situational cues about competition, effort, and rewards (Ames, 1992), considerable evidence exists that it is a stable trait (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; Button, et al., 1996; Colquitt & Simmering,
More recently, the performance goal orientation construct has been broken out into performance-prove goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation. Individuals stronger in performance-prove goal orientation regulate their behavior according to the potential for positive outcomes, while those with a performance-avoid goal orientation regulate their behavior according to potential negative outcomes (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Empirical research assessing the effects of these three goal orientation dimensions has demonstrated that individuals engage in self-regulatory activities depending on their dominant goal orientation (Porath & Bateman, 2006).

As this brief review indicates, to date, broad personality variables (i.e., goal orientation) and the feedback environment have demonstrated main effects on feedback seeking behavior. More recently however, feedback researchers have adopted theoretical perspectives in which broad personal characteristics and aspects of the work environment combine or interact to influence more narrow, domain-specific traits, which in turn, affect how individuals engage in the feedback process (Herold & Fedor, 1998; London & Smither, 2002). As noted by Ajzen and Fishbein (1977), the use of broad personality constructs to predict narrow, domain-specific behaviors may result in weak or non-existent relationships. Echoing these sentiments, feedback theorists (Herold & Fedor, 1998; London & Smither, 2002) have argued that sufficient research has been done examining the effects of broad person-variables and the feedback context in isolation. Research attention should now, they argue, turn to the examination of the interaction of the feedback context and broad individual differences on narrow corresponding person-variables likely to better predict feedback seeking. One example of such a narrow, domain-specific trait that will be investigated in the current study is feedback orientation.
To date, researchers also have not examined the relationships between the feedback environment, broad and narrow personality variables, and feedback seeking. In order to better understand the motives underlying employee feedback seeking, investigators should address the deficiencies in the research literature by studying the effects of individual differences in tandem with those of the feedback environment in order to shed more light on the processes underlying feedback seeking. Thus, this study seeks to assess the interactive effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) on a newly-validated feedback-specific individual difference variable tapping one’s feedback orientation (Grefe, 2006). Specifically, the organization’s feedback environment is believed to interact with trait goal orientation to determine one’s feedback orientation, which in turn, influences the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior (see Figure 1).

Relating Feedback Seeking to Job Performance

Whereas some research has investigated the outcomes of feedback seeking at both the individual and organizational level (Ashford et al., 2003; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Morrison, 1993; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Renn & Fedor, 2001; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), very little attention has been devoted to assessing the effects of feedback seeking on job performance. Furthermore, the findings of those studies that have been carried out are somewhat equivocal. Some studies find effects (Morrison, 1993) and others find no evidence for this link (Ang, Cummings, Straub, & Earley, 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996). The inconsistencies resulting from studies assessing the direct bivariate effects of feedback seeking on job performance have led contemporary feedback researchers to
argue that the influence of feedback seeking on job performance is complex and likely indirect (Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison, 2002; VandeWalle, 2003).

In accordance with this proposition, recent research has begun investigating role clarity as a proximal mediating variable linking feedback seeking to job performance. Role clarity, characterized as an awareness of the role requirements of a given position and the outcomes of good/poor performance (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), has been empirically linked to feedback seeking (Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000) as well as job performance (Blau, 1988; Fried, Ben-David, Tiegs, Avital, & Yeverechyahu, 1998; McEnrue, 1984, Nhundu, 1992). Bivariate results such as these have resulted in empirical work examining role clarity as a mediator of the feedback seeking/job performance relationship. However, this research has resulted in relatively fragmented and inconsistent findings. For example, Renn and Fedor (2001) demonstrated that feedback-seeking behavior improved work quantity and quality through increased goal setting. Furthermore, Whitaker et al. (in press) found that role clarity mediates the link between feedback seeking and job performance. Importantly, these results indicate that in order to effectively regulate goal-directed behavior for the sake of successful job performance, one must acquire an accurate understanding of role expectations and performance standards. Conversely, Brown, Ganesan, and Challagalla (2001) found no evidence for role clarity as a mediator of the feedback seeking/job performance link. These contradictory results may indicate that in any model examining the influence of role clarity as a mediating mechanism underlying the relationship between the feedback
strategies and job performance, inclusion of relevant moderators should be considered in order to explain some of the apparent inconsistencies in the literature.

To address this issue, the current study employs social skill (Hogan & Shelton, 1998) as a moderator in the proposed model. Social skill is a social influence construct tapping the extent to which one perceives useful information and communicates well during social interaction. Hogan and Shelton (1998) argued that social skill is a necessary component for successful goal accomplishment. It dictates how well individuals work in cooperation with others to reach both individual and organizational goals. Indeed, recent research shows that social skill influences many outcomes of interest to organizations. For example, social skill has been found to have important main effects on training efficacy (Ferris, Bergin, & Gilmore, 1986) and leader emergence and effectiveness (Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003). Furthermore, it has also been found to moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance (Witt & Ferris, 2003), general mental ability and job performance (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001), and perceived organizational support and job performance (Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway, & Ferris, 2006). However, social skill has not been examined in the context of feedback seeking. For the purposes of this study, given the inherently social nature of the feedback exchange (Ashford & Tsui, 1991), social skill is thought to influence how effectively individuals integrate and interpret feedback information from supervisors and coworkers to clarify role requirements and organizational goals. As such, the current model seeks to assess the extent to which social skill moderates the association between feedback seeking and role clarity (Figure 1).
The Present Study

In sum, the purpose of the present investigation is to explicate a model serving to further expand the current feedback literature by illuminating the links between the feedback environment and job performance. This study seeks to demonstrate this association in two important ways. First, this model seeks to explore an indirect mechanism by which the feedback environment influences feedback-seeking behavior. Feedback-seeking researchers have come to theorize that broad personality traits interact with the feedback environment to evoke a more narrow, feedback-specific individual difference construct (feedback orientation), which will better predict feedback-seeking behaviors. This study seeks to advance the literature by assessing the interactive effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation on feedback orientation to predict feedback seeking. Second, very little research exists examining the effects of feedback seeking on job performance. Whereas role clarity has shown some promise as a mediating mechanism through which feedback seeking may influence job performance, the few studies assessing this link have resulted in inconsistent and unclear findings. The model in Figure 1 suggests that social skill, a variable thought to tap information-seeking effectiveness, moderates this mediation; thus potentially clarifying the reported inconsistencies.

While the primary focus of this study is on the model linking the feedback environment to feedback seeking to impact job performance, this study also seeks to more closely examine the relationships between subdimensions of the feedback environment and feedback orientation in order to better understand the relationships between these two domains. While no one has yet disaggregated these constructs to
investigate the links between constituent elements of these two domains, results from such analyses may inform organizational practitioners regarding which specific aspects of the feedback environment preferentially influence specific aspects of employee feedback orientation. Based on the feedback seeking literature, hypotheses are derived linking specific facets of the feedback environment to theoretically appropriate facets of feedback orientation. Following this, exploratory analyses are conducted to investigate whether the facets of the feedback environment influence theoretically-specified subdimensions of feedback orientation to a greater extent than the global feedback environment, or if the composite feedback environment predicts feedback orientation facets just as well.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid rate at which organizations undergo change nowadays has led to an increased emphasis on employee self-development and continuous learning (London & Smither, 2002). As employees adapt to a constantly changing work environment, feedback becomes an increasingly salient means of guiding, motivating, and reinforcing effective behaviors while reducing (or eliminating altogether) detrimental behaviors. In the realm of industrial/organizational psychology, feedback is defined as information that conveys an evaluation of the quality of an employee’s performance (London & Smither, 2002). This obtained information can, in turn, be used to regulate or improve future performance and may also serve a motivational function when it provides information about outcomes associated with work behavior.

Given the importance of the feedback itself for job performance, feedback researchers and theorists have recently begun identifying and operationalizing the characteristics of the workplace context that encourage the transmission and receipt of accurate performance-related information. At an aggregate level, these characteristics are collectively referred to as the feedback environment (Levy et al., 1995; Steelman et al., 2004; Williams et al., 1999). Only recently, however, have feedback researchers and theorists turned their attention to modeling the influence of the feedback environment on
job performance. Whereas the feedback environment has been linked to job performance through a variety of intervening mechanisms (Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Rosen, et al., 2006; Steelman & Levy, 2001), only one study has examined how the feedback environment affects job performance through feedback seeking behavior (Whitaker et al., in press). This study found that self-reported feedback-seeking behavior mediated the effects of the feedback environment on job performance. However, the feedback environment research is still lacking in several critical areas. Specifically, no one has explicated the mechanisms underlying the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback seeking. In addition, the effects of feedback seeking on job performance are currently unclear and empirical results are inconsistent. Therefore, this study is an attempt to construct a model rectifying these deficiencies in the feedback literature.

To begin with, the current state of feedback environment research will be explored, with special emphasis on those studies that have linked aspects of a supportive feedback environment to feedback seeking as well as the measurement of this construct. Following this, the proposed model depicted in Figure 1 of the previous chapter is elaborated. In order to develop a model explicating the underlying mechanisms linking the feedback environment to feedback-seeking behavior, this study incorporates current theorizing on the interaction of the feedback environment and broad personality variables to influence feedback seeking. Additionally, research linking feedback seeking to job performance will be explored, inconsistencies in the literature will be discussed, and social skill will be proposed as a moderator of this link in order to account for these inconsistencies. Each theoretical link, mediational chain, and proposed moderator in the
model will be explained in detail and each section will culminate in hypotheses designed
to examine individual constituent relationships comprising the proposed model.

The Feedback Environment

The Feedback Environment and feedback seeking. Since the seminal work of
Ashford and Cummings (1983), many researchers have begun to emphasize the active
role employees take in seeking feedback in order to reduce uncertainty surrounding their
performance and establish the extent to which their work behavior is deemed acceptable
by the organization (Ashford, 1986). Whereas a number of other environmental variables
such as leadership style (Levy, Cober, & Miller, 2002) and source mood (Ang, et al.,
1993) have been subsequently identified and their effects on feedback seeking behavior
have been empirically demonstrated, less research attention has been devoted to the study
of the feedback environment and its influence on feedback seeking behavior.

An organization’s feedback environment has classically been defined as the job
performance information, from many differing sources, that employees perceive to be
available to them (Greller & Herold, 1975; Hanser & Muchinsky, 1978). Older
conceptualizations and attendant measures of the feedback environment limit the
definition of this construct to the amount and availability of positive and negative
feedback from various sources (Herold & Parsons, 1985; Ilgen, Hobson, & Dugoni,
1981). Recognizing that environmental factors over and above the feedback sign likely
influence feedback seeking, researchers began investigating the extent to which
organizational norms and social influences impact active feedback seeking.

Northcraft and Ashford (1990) initially investigated the contextual influence of an
audience on the frequency of feedback seeking behavior by testing whether an individual
would seek feedback in the presence of others. These authors operationalized the feedback environment as consisting of a public feedback situation (wherein one seeks feedback from a target feedback source while others, who may or may not serve in an evaluative capacity, are present) and a private feedback situation (which typically involves only the presence of the feedback source during feedback seeking). They found only partial support for the influence of an audience on feedback seeking, however, a follow-up study demonstrated that people are indeed more likely to seek feedback in a private, rather than public, context (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). The results of this study indicate that people are concerned with the social costs of their behavior, and they pay attention to social cues regarding those costs.

Levy et al. (1995) further explored contextual influences on feedback seeking frequency. They proposed a model of the feedback seeking process describing the conditions under which an employee initially intends to seek feedback, only to reconsider prior to requesting it. They operationalized the feedback environment in terms of a private condition (similar to Ashford and Northcraft’s private condition – that is, truly private), a public condition (others present during feedback seeking) and lastly a semi-private dimension. The semi-private condition was similar to the Northcraft and Ashford (1990) conceptualization of a private condition and was defined as a feedback situation in which only one other person – the feedback source – was present during feedback seeking.

According to the Levy et al. (1995) model, the feedback context and individual differences interact and are important determinants of the feedback seeking process over three phases: the initial intent to seek feedback, reconsideration of feedback intent and
lastly, modification of feedback intent. This study found that for students engaged in a
time-management task, feedback inquiry was less frequent in a public feedback condition
than those in semi-private or private conditions. These data further indicated that when
people reconsider and modify their feedback seeking behaviors, they do so largely
because of impression management concerns and/or ego-enhancement concerns (Levy et
al., 1995). In other words, this study empirically demonstrated that a strong desire for
feedback exists until the publicness of the feedback context becomes known, at which
point potential feedback seekers reconsider and refrain from feedback inquiry due to
impression management concerns.

Together, the Ashford and Northcraft (1992), Northcraft and Ashford (1990), and
Levy et al. (1995) studies support the findings of other researchers indicating that costs
associated with feedback seeking (i.e, self-presentation costs, ego costs, effort costs) can
have deleterious effects on feedback seeking behavior (Ashford, 1986; Fedor, et al.,
1992; Vandewalle et al., 2000). Moreover, the Ashford and Northcraft (1992), Northcraft
and Ashford (1990), and Levy et al., (1995) studies highlight the importance of the
context in the formation of these perceptions.

Extending Levy et al.’s (1995) findings, Williams et al. (1999) investigated
whether the creation of supportive source and peer feedback environments increased
employee’s willingness to seek feedback in public conditions. The results of this lab
study demonstrated that when participants were ensured that feedback seeking would be
supported and accepted by the feedback source and shown that feedback was reacted to
favorably by peers, feedback seeking behaviors increased. Specifically, they found that
those in the supportive conditions sought feedback more often than those in the
unsupportive and Levy et al.’s (1995) public conditions. Furthermore, participants in the supportive-source positive peer conditions sought more feedback than those in any other condition. This effect closely mirrored the pattern of feedback seeking demonstrated in Levy et al.’s (1995) private condition. These results suggest that if employees experience both a supportive source and positive peer reactions to feedback, they seek feedback to the same extent as those in private conditions.

Importantly, the findings of Levy et al. (1995) and Williams et al. (1999) empirically demonstrate that creating a context in which feedback seeking is supported by feedback sources and peers may counteract cost perceptions that may otherwise restrict employees’ tendencies to engage in the feedback seeking process. In addition, a supportive feedback environment also serves to increase the expectancy value of feedback seeking, ultimately elevating levels of feedback seeking behavior. For example, several empirical studies have now shown that source supportiveness enhances the belief that feedback sought will be useful for improving performance (Tuckey, Brewer, & Barnes, 2006; VandeWalle et al., 2000; Williams et al., 1999) and others have shown that higher levels of perceived expectancy value positively influences feedback-seeking behavior (Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle et al., 2000).

The results of the studies outlined in the previous section imply that supportive supervisor and coworker feedback-related behavior create an environment characterized by lowered perceptions of costs and heightened perceptions of expectancy value associated with feedback seeking. Thus, supportive feedback sources may strengthen an employee’s ability to withstand the potentially negative experience of public feedback seeking and serve as primes reminding employees of the beneficial outcomes of seeking
performance feedback, perceptions which manifest themselves in elevated levels of feedback seeking behavior. At an applied level, the general implication of these studies suggests that organizations should focus on developing positive supervisor and coworker feedback-seeking environments to positively influence feedback-seeking behavior.

In part, as a result of the preceding research findings demonstrating that feedback-seeking behavior can be influenced by relevant contextual variables over and above the feedback message (Herold & Parsons, 1985; Ilgen et al., 1981), researchers have called for a re-conceptualization of the feedback environment. Thus, more recent conceptualizations of the feedback environment stress a more comprehensive view of the effects of the feedback environment on feedback seeking. Feedback researchers have come to argue that the feedback environment should not be defined singularly by the feedback itself; rather, it should be operationalized as multidimensional, capturing the broad social and situational context in which day-to-day feedback occurs.

In response to this new way of defining the feedback environment, Steelman et al. (2004) developed and validated a new multidimensional construct to assess the extent to which feedback is supported by the workplace. The authors operationalize the feedback environment in terms of two major sources, the supervisor and the coworker. Thus, an employee experiences two distinct yet related environments: one involves daily feedback-related interactions with supervisors and the other, daily feedback-related interactions with coworkers. The supervisor and coworker environments are further manifested in seven major dimensions. Source Credibility refers to the supervisors’ and coworkers’ expertise and trustworthiness as a feedback source. Feedback Quality refers to the perceptions of consistency and usefulness of the feedback. Feedback Delivery refers to
the perceived supportiveness with which supervisor and coworker feedback is delivered. Supportiveness includes providing consistent feedback in a cheerful manner and graciously sharing feedback information. Favorable Feedback encompasses the frequency of positive feedback (i.e., compliments). Unfavorable Feedback refers to the frequency of negative feedback (i.e., criticisms) that is consistent with the recipient’s beliefs that his/her performance warrants such feedback. Source Availability refers to the amount of contact the recipient has with supervisors and coworkers and the amount of effort that must be expended to obtain feedback. Lastly, Promotes Feedback Seeking refers to the supportiveness of the source in promoting feedback-seeking behavior.

Steelman et al., (2004) conceptualization implies the aforementioned supervisor and coworker elements combine together to shape or form one’s perception of the feedback environment. Thus, the various supervisor and coworker facets may be viewed as causes, rather than reflections, of global feedback environment perceptions. This suggests the FES may be more accurately described as a summative measure rather than a reflective measure. Summative measures are composites of indicators that may intercorrelate to differing degrees and that remain conceptually distinct. Despite their potential distinctness however, summative measure indicators are thought to represent essential aspects of the overarching construct of interest (Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000; MacCallum & Browne, 1993). Investigating the feedback environment in a latent framework would require specifying the differentiated aspects as causes of a latent composite representing the total feedback environment. In a manifest variable model, however, the feedback environment could be represented by a composite variable composed of the sum of all feedback environment facets.
During construct validation, the reliability and validity of the FES and its seven dimensions was established (Steelman et al., 2004). This study also demonstrated that many factors other than feedback sign (Herold & Parsons, 1985; Ilgen, et al., 1981) positively predict feedback-seeking behavior. Indeed, for both supervisors and coworkers, source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, favorable feedback, unfavorable feedback, source availability, and promoting feedback seeking all predicted feedback seeking. Furthermore, supporting the research findings of Ashford and Northcraft (1992) and Williams et al. (1999), this study found that the strongest predictor of seeking feedback from one’s supervisor was the degree to which supervisors actually promoted a supportive feedback environment. Similarly, the strongest predictor of seeking feedback from coworkers was the extent to which coworkers promoted an environment conducive to feedback seeking behavior.

Importantly, Steelman et al. (2004) showed that relevant feedback-related contextual variables influenced feedback-seeking behavior, thus demonstrating that the FES may be a useful tool for designing programs directed towards increasing feedback interactions among employees. To date, however, the mechanisms underlying this association remain relatively unexplored.

In an initial attempt to identify influential linkages between a supportive feedback environment and feedback seeking, Whitaker, et al. (in press) investigated the extent to which effort costs, which reflect the amount of effort that one must expend when seeking feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), might moderate this relationship. Based on Renn and Fedor’s (2001) argument that employees unwilling and unmotivated to take initiative in seeking feedback information likely refrain from doing so, Whitaker et al. (in press)
thorized that despite a culture espousing the availability of feedback and value of feedback seeking, those individuals who perceive more effort costs should tend to forego feedback-seeking opportunities. Ultimately, Whitaker et al. (in press) found that feedback seeking from coworkers is reduced when employees perceive too many costs associated with feedback seeking frequency. These results provide preliminary evidence to indicate that the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback seeking may be more complicated than the direct, bivariate relationship specified by Steelman et al. (2004). Whereas these results speak to the effects of a rather narrow perceptual impediment (personal effort expenditures) on the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback seeking, feedback theorists have posited that supportive feedback-related situational factors likely evoke a feedback-specific trait (i.e., a feedback orientation), which in turn influences the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior (Grefe, 2006; London & Smither, 2002).

The Feedback Environment and Feedback Orientation

London and Smither (2002) define feedback orientation as a multi-dimensional construct that describes one’s overall receptivity to feedback, one’s propensity to seek feedback and process it mindfully, the degree to which one believes feedback to be valuable and feels accountable for its use, and the extent to which one is sensitive to the views of others. Recently, Grefe (2006) developed and validated a multi-dimensional measure of feedback orientation based on London and Smither’s definition of this construct. This measure captures four dimensions tapping the feedback orientation construct. Utility, an individual’s belief that feedback can lead to other valued outcomes is based on London and Smither’s dimension “belief in the value of feedback.”
Accountability, an individual’s tendency to feel a sense of obligation to act on feedback is based on London and Smither’s dimension entitled “feeling accountable to act on feedback.” Social awareness, the tendency to use feedback to be aware of other’s views of oneself and to be sensitive to these views, is based on what London and Smither describe as an individual’s “sensitivity to other’s views of oneself” (2002, p. 83). Lastly, Feedback Self-Efficacy, an individual’s tendency to have confidence in dealing with feedback situations and the content of the feedback itself, emerged as an important construct after reviewing literature on individual differences in the feedback process (i.e., self-esteem and self-efficacy).

Over the course of two pilot studies and two focal studies, Grefe (2006) found substantial data supporting the reliability of the four dimensions and the scale on the whole, suggesting that these dimensions are important components for capturing an individual’s feedback orientation. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that the positive and reinforcing experiences with feedback resulting from a supportive feedback environment increases individuals’ acceptance of feedback and contributes to the development of a favorable feedback orientation. Based on these results, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of a supportive feedback environment are positively related to feedback orientation.*
The Interaction of the Feedback Environment and Individual Differences

While the literature outlined in the previous section speaks to the main effect of the feedback environment on feedback orientation, other researchers have highlighted the need for empirical research focusing on the simultaneous assessment of broad and narrow dispositional factors involved in the performance feedback encounter (Herold & Fedor, 1996; Levy et al., 1995; London & Smither, 2002; Morrison, 2002). Findings from this line of research would serve to illuminate our understanding of the processes by which the feedback environment influences employee willingness or hesitation to engage in the feedback seeking process.

Since Ashford and Cummings’ (1983) suggestion that individuals actively seek feedback, researchers have identified a host of individual differences that drive the predilection to seek performance feedback information. These include tolerance for ambiguity (Bennett, Herold, & Ashford, 1990), feedback propensity (Herold, et al., 1996), public self-consciousness (Levy et al., 1995), cultural differences (Sully DeLuque & Sommer, 2000), self-esteem (Fedor, et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1995; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990), and goal orientation (Norris-Watts, 2004; Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, et al., 2000).

Given the findings demonstrating the effects of individual differences on feedback seeking behavior, in conjunction with more recent work showing that a supportive feedback environment increases feedback seeking (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Levy et al., 1995; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Steelman et al., 2004; Williams et al., 1999), feedback theorists have called for an examination of how personality variables interact
with the feedback context to influence the frequency with which one engages in the feedback seeking process.

Morrison (2002) reviewed the literatures on employee feedback seeking and information seeking among organizational newcomers to develop an integrated model of employee information seeking. According to this longitudinal model based largely on Morrison and Bies (1991) and Levy et al. (1995), individual characteristics (i.e., learning goal orientation, motivation) and contextual elements (i.e., ambiguity, goal clarity) influence one’s felt need for feedback. This in turn manifests itself in a decision to seek feedback, leading to positive outcomes such as uncertainty reduction and increased job performance. In this model, the link between felt need for feedback and feedback seeking is moderated by the perceived costs associated with feedback seeking, where one’s assessment of costs are affected by individual differences such as self-esteem or assertiveness, source characteristics, and aspects of the feedback context.

Similarly, Levy et al. (1995) empirically tested a model of the feedback seeking process addressing the combined effects of disposition and the feedback environment. Briefly, as this model has been explored in depth in the previous section, these authors found that individual differences and aspects of the feedback context interact over time such that (a) those higher in public self-consciousness intended initially to seek more feedback (especially for those higher in social anxiety), (b) feedback seeking frequency was a function of the perceived privacy of the context, and (c) those higher in self-esteem modified intentions to seek feedback more when in public or semi-private conditions out of a need to protect the ego.
Another theoretical model highlighting the interactive effects of the feedback context and personality variables was put forth by Herold and Fedor (1998), who argued that the performance feedback literature has focused too much on what is available for processing and not enough on how such information is created and elicited. This overwhelming focus on situational variables, they argue, has overshadowed person characteristics and led to “trait neglect” in the literature, which has set a boundary on our understanding of feedback processes. Defining the feedback environment as “information available about one’s performance” and taking a proactive performer view of feedback seeking (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), they see the feedback seeker as an active agent in the feedback process. Based on their literature review, they contend that individual differences may operate by shaping the nature of feedback cues available, the way in which feedback cues are processed, and in influencing the responses enacted in reaction to these cues. In this light, individuals differentially interact with their feedback environment and these interactions subsequently shape behaviors and attitudes such as the development of performance standards, how they obtain information to help gauge discrepancies from these standards, and self-regulatory activity meant to minimize these discrepancies.

However, they warn that global measures of individual difference variables may hamper feedback researchers as the use of broad, global measures (i.e., self-esteem, goal orientation) for the prediction of somewhat narrow behaviors (i.e., feedback seeking) may lead to weak relationships (Azjen & Fishbein, 1975). As such, they call for researchers to develop richer, more theoretically-driven conceptualizations of which individual differences matter in the context of performance feedback because traits may sometimes
operate solely within certain settings, a situation otherwise known as the “passive” form of the person-situation interaction (Funder, 1991). The passive interaction perspective (Funder, 1991) argues that certain personality characteristics are activated in certain situations. In terms of feedback processes, the passive interaction approach contends that global predispositions may not predict behavior in contexts where the processing and generation of feedback are of interest. Rather, as argued by Herold and Fedor (1998), feedback researchers should more precisely target domain-specific, feedback-oriented predispositions as predictors of feedback-relevant behavior. In order to more precisely predict shaping and processing behaviors as well as responses to feedback, Herold, Parsons, and Rensvold (1996) developed a more domain-specific measure of feedback propensity. This measure taps preference for externally-generated feedback, preference for internally-generated feedback, and the perceptions of one’s ability to accurately generate internal feedback. However, this scale has been criticized on several grounds (Grefe, 2006). For example, Herold et al. (1996) offered little theoretical rationale for the preferential focus on feedback preferences. Moreover, the feedback literature suggests that more factors than just an individual’s preference for internal and external feedback that can affect how an individual engages in the feedback process. Ultimately, this scale’s inadequate theoretical focus led to general dissatisfaction and disuse by feedback researchers (Grefe, 2006).

In a similar vein, London and Smither (2002) adopted a person-environment interaction view and developed a longitudinal, dynamic model in which individual-level variables (i.e., learning goal orientation, openness to experience) interact with the organization’s feedback culture over time to influence and shape a person’s feedback
orientation. London and Smither (2002) define the feedback culture as an environment in which high quality feedback is available, active feedback seeking is supported by relevant others, and employees are encouraged to continuously obtain, solicit, and utilize both formal and informal feedback in order to improve job performance. This definition of feedback culture is closely conceptually related to Steelman et al.’s (2004) operationalization of the feedback environment. Indeed, Steelman et al.’s (2004) multi-dimensional operationalization of the feedback environment incorporates London and Smither’s (2002) facets constituting the feedback culture, as well as several other important feedback-related contextual elements (source credibility, the provision of both favorable and unfavorable feedback).

As detailed in the previous section, based on London and Smither’s (2002) conceptualization, Grefe (2006) defines feedback orientation as a multi-dimensional construct that describes one’s belief that feedback is instrumental for the attainment of valued outcomes, and his/her tendency to feel a sense of obligation to act on feedback, use feedback to be aware of other’s views of oneself and to be sensitive to these views, and have confidence in dealing with feedback situations and the content of the feedback itself. In addition to demonstrating this construct’s convergent, discriminant, and criterion-related validity, an individual’s feedback orientation was found to positively relate to the feedback environment and learning goal orientation as well as emerge as a significant predictor of self-reported feedback seeking and intentions to seek feedback. Furthermore, Grefe (2006) found that feedback orientation predicts feedback seeking above and beyond the feedback environment and learning goal orientation.
Grefe’s (2006) results indicate that this new measure of feedback orientation more adequately captures the domain of potential individual differences influencing the feedback process. Importantly, these results bolster London and Smither’s (2002) assertions that feedback researchers should incorporate narrower feedback-relevant person variables (i.e., feedback orientation) into models assessing the effects of the feedback environment and broad personality traits on feedback seeking behavior in order to obtain a greater understanding of how individual differences influence the feedback process and facilitate better prediction of feedback seeking behavior. According to the London and Smither (2002) model, one’s feedback orientation develops as feedback comes to have more meaning and value for the feedback seeker. However, the extent to which one develops an orientation toward feedback depends, in part, upon the organization’s support and climate for learning as well as that individual’s traits. In this sense, feedback orientation is proposed to be a more malleable individual characteristic than other variables explored, such as self-esteem or self-efficacy.

Closer examination of the feedback process models outlined in the previous section indicates a great deal of conceptual commonality. According to London and Smither’s (2002) model, predispositions and the organization’s feedback culture, in concert, interactively shape a person’s feedback orientation, a much narrower personality dimension, to influence feedback seeking. Similarly, Herold and Fedor (1998) argue that broad individual difference variables continuously interact with the feedback context to shape feedback cues available, the processing of those cues, and enacted responses. Furthermore, in environments wherein self-assessment is relevant, the interplay between broad predispositions and the feedback environment gives rise to a more narrow
personality trait, feedback orientation, which in turn impacts the degree to which one seeks feedback. Morrison’s (2002) integrated model proposes that one’s predisposition (ie, learning goal orientation, motivation) and contextual elements interact to influence perceptions of costs, which in turn impacts feedback seeking behavior. Lastly, Levy et al. (1995) provide some empirical evidence of the moderation of feedback context and individual differences on a narrower feedback-related predictor by finding an interaction of self-esteem and the feedback context on the modification of feedback seeking intentions. Overall, these frameworks all seem to indicate that broad personality variables should interact with the feedback environment to influence one’s feedback orientation.

In determining which broad personality traits likely interact with the feedback environment to influence feedback orientation, it is critical to bear in mind the known determinants of feedback seeking. In their seminal work, Ashford and Cummings (1983) proposed that two key determinants of feedback seeking behavior are (1) personally held goals of the individual and (2) perceptions about the self-presentation costs and value of feedback seeking. Regarding differences in goals held by individuals, Dweck and Leggett (1988) argued that people differ in terms of goal orientations, or preferences toward different types of goals in achievement situations. Dweck and Leggett (1988) identified two main subtypes of goal orientation: (a) a learning goal orientation, characterized by a drive to develop competencies through the acquisition of new skills and the mastering of new situations, and (b) a performance goal orientation, which is associated with placing emphasis on validating competence by seeking favorable judgments while avoiding negative judgments.
Generally, those with a learning goal orientation subscribe to the incremental theory of ability, which states that ability is a malleable attribute that can be developed (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Those with a learning goal orientation view feedback as a strategy for gaining desired diagnostic information for increased job performance. As a result, these individuals see more value in feedback seeking behavior (VandeWalle, et al., 2000) and are less concerned with judgments regarding ability that others infer from their feedback seeking behavior (Tuckey, et al., 2002) as well as other costs associated with feedback seeking behavior (i.e., ego costs, and effort costs; Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle, 2003; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). In contrast, performance goal orientation is associated with an entity theory, which states that ability is a fixed attribute, and at best difficult to develop (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). For those high in performance goal orientation, feedback is not seen as a particularly effective as performance is not seen as readily amenable to improvement. Thus, performance goal oriented employees perceive feedback as low in value (Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), tend to regulate behavior (i.e., increase feedback-seeking frequency) according to the potential for positive evaluations, (Tuckey, et al., 2002), view negative performance feedback as a threatening judgment about their fixed ability, and see the effort expended in feedback seeking as a sign of lack of ability (VandeWalle, 2003).

The aforementioned research strongly suggests that, due to divergent perceptions of values and costs, learning and performance goal orientation are differentially related to feedback seeking behavior. Indeed, several studies have shown that learning goal oriented individuals seek feedback at a higher rate than those with a performance goal

More recently, however, empirical research indicates that goal orientation is best represented not by two but by three dimensions (Attenweiler & Moore, 2006; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996; Reichard, 2001; Siejts, Latham, Tasa, & Latham, 2004; VandeWalle, 1997). Specifically, this research suggests that performance goal orientation should be partitioned into performance-prove goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation.

Those with a performance-prove goal orientation tend to focus on their abilities and are driven to appear more competent than fellow employees. In contrast, performance-avoid goal orientation is characterized as self-regulation focused on avoiding negative outcomes (i.e., other’s negative evaluations). Thus, those with either a learning goal orientation or a performance-prove goal orientation perceive challenge in an achievement setting which facilitates cognitive and affective investment in the task at hand, which ultimately orients the employee to success-relevant information. Conversely, those with a performance-avoid goal orientation are attuned to the prospect of potential failure, tend to withdraw cognitive resources and become less involved in the task, and, as a result, are oriented toward the presence of failure-relevant information (Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996).

Research has demonstrated that the three-factor representation routinely provides a better fit to sample data over the two-factor model (Attenweiler & Moore, 2006; Reichard, 2001; Siejts, et al., 2004). Moreover, the unique effects of the three goal orientation constructs on self-regulatory behavior have recently been established. Porath
and Bateman (2006) demonstrated that because those with a learning goal orientation or a performance-prove goal orientation believe that greater effort leads to success (Ames, 1992), they engage in self-regulation tactics (i.e., proactive behavior and feedback seeking) to a greater degree than those characterized by a performance-avoid goal orientation. Moreover, because performance-avoid goal orientation predisposes individuals to focus on avoiding failures and passively engage in task accomplishment (Elliot & Church, 1997), it was not related to any of the self-regulatory tactics under study (proactive behavior, feedback seeking, emotional control, and social competence).

The preceding literature review on goal orientation suggests that the separate subdimensions of goal orientation differ in the extent to which they perceive instrumental value in self-regulatory behaviors in general, and feedback seeking specifically. Accordingly, one’s goal orientation may moderate the effects of the feedback environment on one’s feedback orientation. According to London (2003), a supportive feedback environment wherein supervisors and coworkers are comfortable providing feedback enhances one’s feedback orientation.

Those with a developed feedback orientation welcome feedback regardless of favorability, do not fear being evaluated, believe that feedback offers insights that will assist them in being more effective, feel obliged to act on obtained feedback, and ultimately believe that feedback is useful. However, as previously outlined, the goal orientations are stable individual difference variables that characteristically differ on these perceptions.

Those with a learning goal orientation find high value and low costs associated with feedback seeking, and see feedback seeking as a self-regulatory mechanism by
which to proactively develop skill and master tasks (Vandewalle et al., 2000). Given the inherent tendency for those with a learning goal orientation to find high value in feedback to begin with, it is likely that the positive effects of the feedback environment on one’s feedback orientation would be attenuated if one is learning goal oriented. Similarly, people with a higher performance-prove goal orientation view self-regulatory behaviors as beneficial, however, these individuals see these activities as means by which to outperform and differentiate themselves from others. Hence, for those with a performance-prove orientation, the positive effects of the feedback environment on one’s feedback orientation should also be attenuated. Lastly, individuals with a higher performance-avoid goal orientation are constrained in devoting energy to self-regulation out of a desire to avoid failures. Because these individuals see little instrumental value in feedback seeking, the positive link between the feedback environment and one’s feedback orientation should be attenuated by performance-avoid goal orientation.

Whereas no research has been conducted assessing the interactive effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation on feedback orientation, research carried out using the two-factor representation of goal orientation has found that aspects of a supportive feedback context may interact with goal orientation to predict feedback-seeking behavior. Madzar (2001) surveyed a sample of experienced engineers and asked them to keep a record of the degree to which they solicited feedback from their supervisor. She found that transformational leaders (those that inspire subordinates via charisma and intellectual stimulation) enhance their subordinates’ proactive feedback seeking, over and above their transactional counterparts (those that lead based on contingent reward and management-by-exception). Furthermore, those subordinates who
were learning goal oriented sought significantly more process and social feedback than performance goal oriented individuals. These results suggest that important elements of the feedback environment, in this case, the presence of leaders who are perceived as high in expertise and are highly available, may enhance employees’ desire to engage in elevated levels of constructive developmentally-related behaviors such as feedback seeking, particularly for those employees interested in positive performance outcomes (i.e., learning goal oriented or performance-prove oriented).

Thus, based on a) the theoretical models put forth by Herold and Fedor (1996), Levy et al. (1995), London and Smither (2002), and Morrison (2002) as well as the empirical work done by Grefe (2006) indicating that a supportive feedback environment positively influences one’s feedback orientation, b) the above theoretical models postulating that broad individual differences interact with the feedback environment to influence one’s feedback orientation, c) the literature indicating that goal orientation may interact with the aspects of the feedback context to influence feedback seeking (Madzar, 2001), and d) the theoretical and empirical work done demonstrating that goal orientation leads to divergent perceptions of the inherent expectancy value, self-presentation costs, and effort costs associated with feedback seeking (Attenweiler & Moore, 2006; Button, et al., 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996; Norris-Watts, 2004; Porath & Bateman, 2006; Reichard, 2001; Siejts et al., 2004; Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle, 2003; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, et al., 2000), the following hypotheses are proposed:
**Hypothesis 2:** The relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation will be moderated by learning goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in learning goal orientation.

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation will be moderated by performance-prove goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in performance-prove goal orientation.

**Hypothesis 4:** The relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation will be moderated by performance-avoid goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in performance-avoid goal orientation.

**Hypothesis 5:** Feedback orientation is positively related to feedback seeking frequency.

**Feedback Seeking and Job Performance**

According to Ashford and Cummings (1983), employees seek feedback information in order to evaluate their own competence, to achieve personally-held goals, and to determine which goals are deemed most important by the organization. Many studies have investigated the outcomes of feedback seeking (i.e., Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Kluger & Denisi, 1996; Mignerey, et al., 1995; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Porath & Bateman, 2006; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000) however, to date a relative dearth of research
exists examining the effects of feedback seeking on job performance. Moreover, the research that has been carried out investigating the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance remains inconsistent and incomplete.

Whereas feedback is largely thought to have a positive effect on job performance (Ilgen et al. 1979), Kluger and DeNisi’s (1996) meta-analysis demonstrated that the effects of feedback-based interventions varied considerably. Moreover, their results suggest that over a third of those studies included in the meta-analysis actually led to lower levels of performance. Similarly, the findings of those studies that have been carried out investigating the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance are somewhat equivocal. For example, Morrison (1993) found that newcomers’ feedback seeking correlated positively with a longitudinal measure of job performance, however, others have found feedback seeking to be unrelated to job performance (Anget al., 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996; Porath & Bateman, 2006). These studies indicate that feedback seeking may not be consistently related to job performance, however, they examine only the direct links between feedback seeking and job performance, thus neglecting to investigate potential mediating or moderating mechanisms. However, as noted by Ashford et al. (2003), the consequences of feedback seeking are complex to assess conceptually as well as empirically. As such, feedback researchers have called for models assessing theoretically-derived moderating and/or mediating mechanisms through which actively-sought feedback influences the attainment of instrumental goals such as job performance (Ashford, 2003; Morrison, 2002; VandeWalle, 2003).

According to feedback theorists, a prominent instrumental outcome of feedback seeking is the attendant reduction in uncertainty regarding behaviors desired by the
organization in goal attainment and how those behaviors are evaluated (Ashford et al., 2003; Taylor, Ilgen, & Fisher, 1984). This proposition is in accord with uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), which postulates that individuals have an aversion to uncertainty and will gather information to reduce feelings of uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction has been identified as the leading motive behind the study of feedback seeking in organizations and as the direct precursor of desire for feedback (Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995; Morrison, 1993; Morrison, 2002). For example, in a cross-sectional field study Ashford and Cummings (1985) found that when employees experienced a great deal of uncertainty (as indicated by self-reports of role ambiguity and contingency uncertainty), their levels of feedback seeking increased. Additional indirect empirical evidence comes from the organizational socialization domain. During socialization, newcomers in organizations often struggle with uncertainty as they learn role expectations and performance standards. As a result, they seek more feedback in order to reduce high levels of uncertainty (Ashford & Black, 1996; Brett, Feldman, & Weingart, 1990; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Combined, these studies suggest that uncertainty about performance goals and appropriate job behaviors may result from the ambiguity inherent in job roles. Thus, feedback seeking may reflect intentional behaviors or strategies used to obtain performance- and job-related information needed in order to effectively regulate goal-directed behavior, thereby reducing perceived role ambiguity. In this case, feedback is beneficial for employees to the extent that it leads to incremental gains in performance and job-related information from others. Thus, it is the ability of feedback to reduce uncertainty or ambiguity regarding one’s role in the organization that is particularly valuable.
According to Banton (1965), a “role” is defined as a set of expectations or norms applied to the individual in the position by both the incumbent as well as others in the organization with whom the incumbent must interact in order to fulfill the position’s obligations. Kahn, et al. (1964), in their classic study on organizational stress, introduced the role episode model, which demonstrates that the incumbent reciprocally interacts with others in the environment via a feedback loop in order to gain the requisite knowledge to successfully carry out his/her responsibilities. Similar to Ashford and Cumming’s (1983) assertions that employees seek feedback in order to learn position-appropriate behaviors, Kahn et al. (1964) further clarify their model to show that adequate performance of one’s job requires that an incumbent know a) the expectations of the position, b) what activities are required to fulfill the role requirements, and c) the consequences of good/poor performance to the self, others in the environment, and the organization.

As more and more researchers have begun to recognize the dynamic nature of the feedback environment (Herold & Fedor, 1998; Levy et al., 1995; London & Smither, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Steelmen et al., 2004), so too have others come to conceptualize role clarity (the conceptual opposite of role ambiguity) as a multi-dimensional, ever-changing element composed of ongoing interactions between the incumbent and the environment (Sawyer, 1992; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoades, 1996). Bauer and Simmon’s (2000) conceptualization stipulates that role clarity is maintained through a series of continuous interactions in a supportive environment that necessarily incorporates goal-setting, ongoing training, and the allotment of recognition and rewards.

Over several generations of researchers, the constructs of role clarity and role ambiguity have been thoroughly investigated. Whereas very little research has been
carried out investigating role clarity as a mediator of the feedback-seeking/job
performance link, more research has been conducted examining the relationships between
role clarity and feedback seeking and job performance individually. Wanberg and
Kammeyer-Mueller (2000), conducting a three-wave longitudinal study investigating the
antecedents and outcomes of proactive feedback seeking, found a significant relationship
between role clarity and feedback seeking behavior. Callister et al.’s (1999) longitudinal
investigation of feedback strategies and source selection of transferees demonstrated that
role clarity was negatively associated with subsequent feedback seeking via the peer
inquiry method. Similarly, Ashford and Cummings (1985) demonstrated that role
ambiguity predicts feedback-seeking behavior. Moreover, they found that this
relationship is moderated by one’s tolerance for ambiguity. The results of these studies
suggest that feedback seeking is associated with role clarity, as those who are unclear
regarding their role requirements seek feedback in order to reduce ambiguity. Similarly,
research that has been carried out examining the effects of role clarity on organizational
outcomes has found a consistent empirical link between role clarity and job performance

In support of theoretical assertions made by Ashford et al. (2003) and Taylor et al.
(1984), recent empirical work suggests that the variable effect for feedback seeking on
job performance may, in part, result from a failure on the part of researchers to consider
role clarity as a more proximal mediating variable. For example, Renn and Fedor (2001)
found that feedback-seeking behavior improved performance through increased goal
setting. Their results indicate that when in settings that provide employees with
information pertaining to work performance and processes, individuals who seek
feedback tend to use it to set feedback-based personal improvement goals, which in turn positively impacted both work quality and quantity. Furthermore, Williams and Johnson (2000) found that feedback seeking was related to greater parity between self-ratings and supervisor ratings of performance. More recently, Whitaker et al. (in press) found that when in an environment conducive to open feedback seeking, perceptions of a positive supervisor and coworker feedback environment led to increased feedback seeking behavior, which then led to higher role clarity and, in turn, higher supervisor-rated job performance. Taken together, these findings suggest that feedback seeking may bolster an employee’s understanding of the expectations of his/her job as well as the comparative level at which they are meeting his or her expectations, which in turn, influences the success with which an employee carries out his/her job requirements. For these reasons, the present model proposes that feedback seeking should relate to job performance through role clarity.

Hypothesis 6: Role clarity will mediate the effects of feedback seeking on job performance.

Social Skill as a Moderator

In contrast to the findings outlined above indicating that role clarity may mediate the link between feedback seeking and job performance, Brown, et al. (2001) found no evidence for role clarity as a mediator of this relationship. These contradictory results may result from Brown et al.’s (2001) use of self-reported performance, however, it may also indicate that in any model examining the influence of role clarity as a mediating
mechanism underlying the relationship between the feedback strategies and job performance, inclusion of relevant moderators should be considered in order to explain some of the apparent inconsistencies regarding role clarity as a mediator of this link.

It is likely that, due to individual differences, employees engage in the feedback process and construe feedback differently, impacting the degree to which role expectations are clarified. In this vein, preliminary research has begun investigating how personality variables influence the quality and interpretation of the feedback received to affect role clarity. Brown et al. (2001) found that self-efficacy demonstrated a marginally significant interactive effect on the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. Persons with higher self-efficacy more effectively interpreted and integrated feedback information to improve role clarity than those with lower self-efficacy. Presumably, these results are due to the ability of those with high self-efficacy to focus on the task at hand and reduce self-defeating negative thinking (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, Ashford and Cummings (1985) found that tolerance for ambiguity moderated the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. Lack of role clarity did not lead to feedback seeking for those more tolerant of ambiguity, suggesting that even when role information is ambiguous, those with a high tolerance for ambiguity are not motivated to seek feedback in order to clarify their role expectations. Taken together, these studies suggest that the strength of the feedback seeking-role clarity relationship may be augmented or attenuated as a function of feedback seeker characteristics.

According to Ashford and Tsui (1991), feedback seeking is a social interaction typically resulting in the attainment of information pertaining to employee concerns regarding work procedures, organizational norms and goals, and performance evaluation.
During the feedback seeking process, employees express feedback needs and construe the source’s message based upon that source’s direct statements, questions asked, and non-verbal reactions to the feedback seeker – all of which occur spontaneously in the feedback interaction (London, 2003). As such, the ability to accurately draw conclusions from the feedback exchange may be somewhat contingent upon one’s insight into interpersonal relationships and the effectiveness with which one interprets direct and indirect social cues. Given the inherently social nature of the feedback seeking exchange process, one’s social effectiveness may influence the degree to which one successfully engages in the feedback exchange to garner the required information needed to clarify organizational roles and responsibilities.

Social effectiveness refers to the extent to which an employee can infer meaning from others’ non-verbal communications, understand others’ direct verbal communications, and utilize obtained knowledge from these exchanges in the pursuit of individual and/or organizational goals (Ferris, Perrewe, & Douglas, 2002). Social effectiveness stems from the early work on social intelligence by Thorndike (1920), and was introduced as a broad, higher-order term that could capture the many separate but related personality constructs developed in the field tapping this construct. The recent research literature has witnessed a proliferation of social effectiveness constructs. These include such constructs as social intelligence, emotional intelligence, political skill, and self-monitoring (for reviews see Ferris et al., 2002; Semandar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006).

A relatively under-researched social effectiveness construct is social skill, which taps, among other things, the extent to which one understands the thoughts and feelings of others, communicates well during interpersonal interaction, perceives useful
information as a product of the exchange, and acts appropriately upon that understanding for goal attainment (Hogan & Shelton, 1998; Witt & Ferris, 2003). Thus, social skill dictates the ability to accurately interpret interpersonal dynamics (the ability to “read between the lines” versus a literal interpretation of others’ comments) and it affects how well individuals work in cooperation with others to reach both individual and organizational goals. Social skill is characteristically dynamic in nature, demonstrating facility in interpersonal interaction. However, it is thought to be distinct from (although modestly correlated with) personality traits. That is, social skill is believed to be partially dispositional and partially developmental in nature (Murtha, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996). Hogan and Shelton (1998) argued that social skill reflects learned social competencies and strategies and is a necessary component for successful goal accomplishment in interpersonal settings.

Arguably, social skill has always had important implications for organizational success. Recently, however, three trends have served to heighten its importance even further. First, the dramatic increase in service-oriented jobs (Goldstein, 1986; Stewart & Carson, 1997) has heightened the demand for skillfully executed social interaction at work. Second, team-based work structures are becoming more prevalent in organizations (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1998), requiring employees to raise the frequency with which they skillfully interact with others in order to accomplish group tasks. Lastly, based on research indicating that managers integrate task and contextual performance ratings when generating an overall job performance rating (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002), contemporary job performance researchers have come to realize the importance of non-task, socially-oriented aspects of work performance.
Currently, social skill has received a modest amount of attention in both the scientific and applied literatures. Ferris, et al. (1986), assessing the selection-utility implications of personality predictors, found that social skill predicts training performance over and above employment interviews in the selection of candidates for a flight attendant training program. In addition, Riggio, et al. (2003), over the course of three studies examining the role that basic social/communication skills play in leader emergence and effectiveness, found that social skill was related to leader emergence and satisfaction with the leader. Furthermore, because social skill acts as a catalyst allowing personality dispositions to demonstrate their positive effects (Hogan & Shelton, 1998), it has also been found to moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance (Witt & Ferris, 2003), general mental ability and job performance (Ferris, et al., 2001), and perceived organizational support and job performance (Hochwarter, et al., 2006). Altogether, this research has demonstrated that well-developed social skill leads to increased organizational contribution through alliance building, the development of social networks, and the acquisition of resources by inducing cooperation among others.

Moreover, these results indicate that social skill influences many outcomes of interest to organizations, supporting Ferris, et al.’s (2001) assertions that social skill is fundamental to all aspects of work. To date, however, the influence of social skill on the feedback seeking process has not been examined.

Generally, social skill represents one’s ability to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of others as well as one’s self in interpersonal situations, and to act appropriately upon that understanding. Specifically, social skill influences both the quality and quantity of work in jobs in which successful job performance is accomplished...
with the assistance of others (i.e., supervisors and coworkers). Social skill is therefore a broad construct that taps the degree to which individuals can perceive useful information, communicate well, and engage in socially effective behavior allowing people to achieve social and organizational goals (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). Furthermore, Norton and Hope (2001) emphasized that social skill also reflects the ability to perceive social information, integrate it with existing goals, and use this new information to work more effectively within a group. Importantly, all of the aforementioned aspects are critical for feedback seekers to apply feedback information effectively.

Arguably, in an environment conducive to feedback seeking, employees should engage in inquiry to a greater degree, leading to greater levels of role clarity and job performance. However, as evidenced by the contradictory findings of Whitaker et al. (in press) and Brown et al. (2001), feedback seeking may not always lead to clarified role expectations and requirements to positively influence subsequent performance. Indeed, interpersonal skills of the feedback seeker may influence the interpersonal dynamics inherent in the feedback exchange process by impacting the skillful execution of social interaction and the clarity with which one interprets direct and indirect social cues. Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence indicating that feedback seekers with higher social skill a) should be able to communicate his/her feedback needs more precisely, b) should be more capable of accurately reading other individuals, perceive greater meaning in feedback, and extract more precise performance- and role- related information, and c) integrate this new information into existing knowledge structures to develop a better sense of role clarity, the following is proposed:
Hypothesis 7: Social skill will moderate the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity such that this relationship will be stronger for those with high social skill.

Facet-level Analyses of the Feedback Environment-Feedback Orientation Link

Grefe’s (2006) analysis of the strength of the feedback environment-feedback orientation link focused on the aggregate level relationship and analyzed this relationship by computing single values to represent an individual’s standing on both the feedback environment and feedback orientation. This aggregate-level analysis is replicated in this study’s Hypothesis 1. While informative and important, this practice effectively treats the constructs as unidimensional, although both domains are indeed multidimensional. However, questions may also be asked about differential relationships among subdimensions of the aggregate constructs. Because some subdimensions of a multidimensional scale may preferentially relate to a given subdimension of another multidimensional scale (Spector, 1992), closer examination of the relationship between subdimensions of the feedback environment and feedback orientation would be useful to understand the relationships between these two domains. At a practical level, results from such analyses may inform organizational practitioners regarding which specific aspects of the feedback environment (i.e., source credibility) may be targeted for intervention as a means to elevate specific aspects of employee feedback orientation (i.e., feedback utility). While research investigating the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation is still in its infancy, research from the broader feedback seeking literature has progressed to the point where more targeted hypotheses may be formulated. Based on this research, it may be useful to disaggregate facets of the feedback
environment and feedback orientation and generate more focused hypotheses, at least as
an initial step in assessing the relationship between the two multidimensional constructs.
Thus, for the purposes of the following ancillary and exploratory analyses, theoretically-
driven relationships of each feedback orientation facet will be hypothesized and analyzed.
Following this, analyses will be carried out to investigate whether some feedback
environment facets account for more variance in each feedback orientation facet than a
composite measure of the feedback environment, or vice versa.

The Feedback Environment and Utility. As previously outlined, utility refers to an
individual’s tendency to believe that feedback is instrumental in achieving goals or
obtaining desired outcomes at work. Perceived usefulness of feedback has surfaced in the
literature as a potential antecedent to utility. For example, Brett and Atwater (2001)
found that the perceived usefulness and accuracy of feedback influences the motivation to
accept, seek, and use feedback. These results indicate that feedback from a trustworthy,
competent supervisor may be seen as instrumental for the attainment of important
outcomes. Furthermore, Makiney and Levy (1998) found that individuals who believed
that feedback from peers was useful and credible were more likely to use this peer-
supplied feedback when making ratings about an employee. These results indicate that
coworkers who are viewed as having some expertise and are seen as competent feedback
sources may provide feedback that is seen as high in utility. To extend this literature, it
seems likely that individuals who work in feedback environments where feedback
sources provide consistent, credible, and high-quality feedback should also tend to
perceive the feedback obtained as useful.
Additionally, in the extant feedback seeking literature, research has begun to support the notion that highly accessible sources may heighten one’s perception that feedback from those sources is high in utility. For example, Herold, Liden, and Leatherwood (1987) found that perceptions of source availability increased the frequency of feedback seeking, suggesting that the accessibility of feedback sources may encourage employees to seek more feedback. Similarly, Vancouver and Morrison (1995) found that participants were more likely to ask for feedback from sources that they perceived as relatively accessible. These results suggest that with more contact, sources may be perceived as having a more intimate knowledge of the feedback seeker’s normative standing and may thus be able to more accurately diagnose problematic behaviors than those who have little contact with the feedback seeker.

Overall, results of these studies indicate that supervisor and coworker source credibility, feedback quality, and availability should emerge as significant predictors of utility. Thus, based on the results of this brief review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 8:** Perceptions of supervisor source credibility, feedback quality, and availability will emerge as significant predictors of utility.

**Hypothesis 9:** Perceptions of coworker source credibility, feedback quality, and availability will emerge as significant predictors of utility.
The Feedback Environment and Accountability. Accountability, defined as an individual’s tendency to feel a sense of obligation to act on feedback, may be positively influenced by the frequency with which feedback sources deliver feedback-related information. For example, Walker and Smither (1999) found that managers who met with direct reports with greater frequency to discuss their upward feedback improved more than those who met less frequently. These results may indicate that more frequent feedback indicates to the employee the importance of acting on feedback for the purposes of elevating levels of job performance. Importantly, Steelman et al (2004) argue that feedback frequency should be operationalized in terms of both the favorable and unfavorable feedback (i.e., compliments and criticisms) received from supervisors and coworkers. Given Walker and Smither’s (1999) findings, it follows that greater frequency of favorable and unfavorable feedback should signal to employees the importance of utilizing feedback to modify work-related behavior, thus improving one’s performance. As such, the extent to which supervisors and coworkers provide both positive and negative feedback may preferentially influence and predict accountability. Given these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 10: Perceptions of supervisor favorable feedback and unfavorable feedback will emerge as significant predictors of accountability.

Hypothesis 11: Perceptions of coworker favorable feedback and unfavorable feedback will emerge as significant predictors of accountability.
**The Feedback Environment and Social Awareness.** Social Awareness, an individual’s tendency to use feedback to be aware of other’s views of oneself and to be sensitive to these views, may be influenced by the extent to which feedback sources actively promote feedback seeking behavior. Social Awareness is conceptually related to Public Self-Consciousness, the tendency to direct attention toward the self as a social object and characteristically feel like others are watching when in the presence of others. Levy, Albright, Cawley, and Williams (1995) found that those higher in PSC had a greater desire for feedback and more seeking intentions than those low in PSC, presumably out of a desire to know what others thought of them and a concern over the appropriateness of their actions in general. Arguably, the act of feedback seeking promotion by supervisors and coworkers should indicate to the feedback seeker the value of feedback seeking for one’s normative performance, which should ultimately increase one’s sensitivity to the opinions and input of others when compared to those with feedback sources that do not promote feedback seeking. Steelman, et al. (2004) found that the promotion of feedback seeking was associated with higher levels of feedback seeking and motivation to use feedback. These results may indicate that promotion makes salient to employees that they are embedded within, and evaluated as a part of, a larger social system. This should, in turn, make employees aware of the need to obtain input from others regarding one’s normative performance. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 12:** Perceptions of supervisor promotion of feedback seeking will emerge as a significant predictor of social awareness.
Hypothesis 13: Perceptions of coworker promotion of feedback seeking will emerge as a significant predictor of social awareness.

The Feedback Environment and Feedback Self-Efficacy. Feedback Self-Efficacy refers to an individual’s tendency to have confidence in dealing with feedback situations and the content of the feedback itself. Dorfman, Stephan, and Loveland (1986) found that supervisor tact and sensitivity during feedback exchange was related to employee motivation to improve job performance. These results suggest that willingly and respectfully sharing information during a feedback exchange may enhance the recipient’s confidence in dealing with feedback situations in general as well as his/her confidence in effectively utilizing feedback received to improve job performance. Conversely, thoughtless and perfunctory feedback may inhibit a feedback receiver’s confidence in his/her ability to deal with the feedback exchange or the obtained feedback. Given these results, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 14: Perceptions of supervisor feedback delivery will emerge as a significant predictor of feedback self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 15: Perceptions of coworker feedback delivery will emerge as a significant predictor of feedback self-efficacy.
Exploratory Analyses

Multidimensional constructs are pervasive in the industrial-organizational psychology literature. For example, in addition to the feedback environment (Steelman, et al., 2004) and feedback orientation (Grefe, 2006) measures, popular multidimensional constructs include job satisfaction (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969), job performance (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002), and broad traits that comprise personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Recently, the utility of multidimensional constructs for the assessment of criterion-related validity has begun to generate considerable debate (Edwards, 2001). Advocates of the multidimensional approach have argued that such constructs typically demonstrate higher criterion-related validity than their constituent dimensions. For example, Ones and Viswesvaran (1996) found that, even when employing multiple criteria, broad personality traits exhibited higher criterion-related validity than their subdimensions individually. Critics, on the other hand, contend that although multidimensional constructs often exhibit higher criterion-related validities than component dimensions, they frequently have lower criterion-related validity than some subdimensions (Aston, 1998).

Keeping with Morrison and Vancouver’s (2000) theoretical argument that employees conceive of supervisors and coworkers as representing differing environmental sources for feedback, at a practical level, multidimensional constructs such as the supervisor and coworker feedback environments are certainly conceptually thorough. However, interventions aimed at elevating general levels of these overall constructs may require such resources of the organization as to make implementation
practically unfeasible. If, however, specific aspects of the supervisor or coworker feedback environment preferentially influence specified outcomes to a greater extent than the composite supervisor or coworker feedback environment, organizations may be more selective regarding which aspects of the supervisor or coworker feedback environment on which they wish to gather data and intervene. In other words, conceptualizing the supervisor or coworker feedback environment as a unidimensional construct may be useful in some circumstances but not others, negating at times the need to gather data on the full composite feedback environment.

For example, some components of the supervisor or coworker feedback environment may generate higher validities for certain outcomes than the composite supervisor or coworker feedback environment. As outlined in the previous section, specific aspects of the supervisor or coworker feedback environment (i.e., source credibility) may preferentially influence specific aspects of employee feedback orientation (i.e., feedback utility). If a facet, or set of facets, of the supervisor or coworker feedback environment were found to have higher criterion-related validity than the composite supervisor or coworker feedback environment for a given feedback orientation facet, organization-implemented interventions meant to elevate levels of that feedback orientation facet would need only focus on and measure the key feedback environment facet(s), rather than the supervisor or coworker feedback environment composite.

In order to address this issue, analyses will be conducted to assess whether the supervisor and coworker feedback environment composites account for more variance in each facet of feedback orientation than the constituent supervisor or coworker feedback environment facets.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students from a large, urban Midwestern university who received extra-credit for their participation in the study. To participate, participants must have been working at least part time and been willing to give permission for the researcher to contact their supervisors. Participants’ supervisors were contacted via mail and surveyed regarding the performance of their subordinate. Subordinates whose supervisors did not return surveys were excluded from further analysis.

Procedure and Design

Survey packets were distributed in class. Subordinates completed measures designed to assess demographic information, their perceptions of the feedback environment in the workplace, goal orientation, feedback orientation, the extent to which they seek feedback, social skill, and their role clarity. Upon survey completion, subordinates completed a consent form allowing their supervisors to be contacted regarding their work performance. The supervisor survey assessed employee task and contextual performance, subordinate feedback seeking, and the supervisor’s demographic information. Supervisors then mailed the completed surveys back to the researchers.
Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all variables were assessed with a 7-point Likert-type response scale with anchors ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Items for all measures are also included in Appendix A.

Demographics. All participants were asked to provide their age, gender, and ethnicity, level of education, job title, number of hours worked per week, and tenure with their organization. Supervisors were also asked to indicate how long they have been supervising their target employee and their tenure as a supervisor. Subordinates were also asked to report length of employment with their supervisor.

Feedback Environment Scale. To measure subordinates’ perceptions of the feedback environment, a shortened version of the 63-item Feedback Environment Scale was used (FES; Steelman et al., 2004). The 42-item FES (α = .93) assesses employee perceptions of the supervisor and co-worker feedback environments, each of which is composed of the following seven facets (six items per facet): source credibility (e.g., “My supervisor/coworkers is/are generally familiar with my performance”), feedback quality (e.g., “The performance feedback I receive from my supervisor/coworkers is helpful”), feedback delivery (e.g., “My supervisor/coworkers is/are supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance”), frequency of favorable feedback (e.g., “My supervisor/coworkers generally lets me know when I do a good job at work”), frequency of unfavorable feedback (e.g., “When I don’t meet deadlines, my supervisor/coworkers lets/let me know”), source availability (e.g., “My supervisor/coworkers is/are usually available when I want performance information”), and promoting feedback seeking (e.g., “My supervisor/coworkers encourages/encourage
me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance”). For the purposes of the current study, the supervisor and coworker feedback environments will be conceptualized as summative constructs and operationalized as the sum of the z-scores of all relevant FES facets.

*Feedback Orientation.* Subordinates’ feedback orientation was measured using Grefe’s (2006) multidimensional scale composed of the following subscales: utility (e.g., “Feedback contributes to my success at work”), accountability (e.g., “It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance”), social awareness (e.g., “I try to be aware of what other people think of me”), and self-efficacy (e.g., “I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback”). The overall alpha of this 20-item scale is acceptable ($\alpha = .91$).

*Goal Orientation.* Goal orientation was assessed using VandeWalle’s (1997) 13-item scale designed for use in the work domain. This scale measures three goal orientation dimensions; learning goal orientation (5 items, $\alpha = .89$), performance-prove goal orientation (4 items, $\alpha = .85$), and performance-avoid goal orientation (4 items, $\alpha = .88$). A sample item from each scale, respectively includes “I often look for new opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge at work,” “I try to figure out what it takes to prove my ability to others at work,” and “I prefer to avoid situations at work where I might perform poorly.”

*Feedback Seeking.* Both supervisors and subordinates were asked to respond to a 12-item multidimensional feedback seeking scale constructed for the purposes of this study and meant to gauge subordinate feedback seeking. Four of the items representing a general feedback seeking subscale were based on Williams and Johnson’s (2000)
feedback seeking measure. This measure was designed to assess the frequency with which subordinates directly seek feedback from their supervisors (two items) and their coworkers (two items). Sample subordinate items include “How often do you ask your supervisor for information about what is required of you to function successfully on the job?” and “How often do you ask your coworkers how well you are doing performing on the job?” This scale is measured with a six-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 6 (Always). Supervisors were asked modified versions of these items: “How often does this employee ask you for information about what is required of him/her to function successfully on the job?” and “How often does this employee ask coworkers how well he/she is performing on the job?”

Respondents were also asked to respond to a 4-item normative feedback seeking scale written for this study. All items in this scale are prefaced with the clause “Compared to the people that I work with, I often…” These items include “…seek clarification when I’m unclear about some aspect of my work,” “…ask for information regarding how to perform specific functions,” “…ask for an informal appraisal of how well I am doing on the job,” and “…ask about which behaviors will help me do my job better.” Supervisors were asked to respond to a modified version of this subscale: “Compared to your other employees, this employee often…” Supervisor items read “…seek clarification when unclear about some aspect of his/her work,” “…ask for information regarding how to perform specific functions,” “…ask for an informal appraisal of how well he/she is doing on the job,” and “…ask about which behaviors will help do his/her job better.”
Lastly, participants were asked to respond to four feedback seeking items, written for this study, that are meant to assess the degree to which one seeks feedback strategically. Subordinate items include “If my supervisor is swamped, I don’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient,” “If my coworkers are swamped, I don’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient,” “I’m careful to seek feedback only when it seems appropriate,” and “If I have a question about my performance or duties at work, I ask for feedback then and there without hesitation.” Supervisors were asked to respond to the following modified items: “When you are swamped, this employee don’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient,” “If his/her coworkers are swamped, this employee doesn’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient,” “This employee is careful to seek feedback only when it seems appropriate,” and “If this employee has a question about his/her performance or duties at work, he/she asks for feedback then and there without hesitation.”

Role Clarity. Sawyer’s (1992) measure of role clarity was used to assess the degree of clarity with which employees understand their position. As per Kahn and colleagues (1964), role clarity was defined in the scale as two distinct but related constructs: goal clarity and process clarity. Respondents were asked to indicate how certain or clear they are about each aspect of their work (i.e., duties and responsibilities, how to schedule a work day). Each subscale is composed of five items rated on a six-point Likert scale (1 = very uncertain, 6 = very certain) and each has shown adequate reliability (α = .92 and .90, respectively).
Social Skill. Social skill was assessed using Ferris et al.’s seven-item measure. Sample items include “In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do” and “I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others.” Coefficient alphas have ranged from .77 to .92 with this instrument (Hochwarter et al., 2006; Witt & Ferris, 2003).

Performance. A performance measure developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was used to assess supervisor reported performance. This performance measure has three dimensions: task performance, Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) directed at the individual (OCBIs), and OCBs directed at the organization (OCBOs). Williams and Anderson (1991) report reliabilities of .91, .88, and .75 respectively. “Adequately completes assigned duties” is a sample item measuring task performance, “Helps others who have a heavy work load” is a sample OCBI item, and “Conserves and protects organizational property” is a sample OCBO item.

Statistical Analysis Strategy

Structural equation modeling software (Mplus v 4.0; Muthén & Muthén, 2006) using maximum likelihood estimation was used for all hypotheses assessing the direct, indirect, and interactive relationships (Hypotheses 1-7) among manifest constructs for the focal model presented in Figure 1. For the purposes of examining the moderators in a path analytic framework, main effect variables and moderator variables were mean-centered prior to computing product term indicators as a way to decrease collinearity between the main effects and the interaction terms.

For the purposes of this study, a manifest job performance construct was employed. The decision to conduct the analysis with a composite performance dependent
variable was made based on the research of Rotundo and Sackett (2002). While these authors do maintain that contextual and task performance are conceptually distinct variables, their policy-capturing study indicated that managers integrate task and contextual performance ratings when generating an overall job performance rating, which was captured with this study’s composite variable. As the participants’ actual supervisors provided performance ratings for this study, this analysis is therefore consistent with the findings of Rotundo and Sackett to combine the task and the OCBI and OCBO facets of performance into a single job performance criterion. Because two-thirds of the items making up the job performance measure assess OCB, the composite variable was weighted more by citizenship behaviors than by task performance behaviors. However, as jobs have become more diverse (Strauss & Connerley, 2003), and organizations have come to expect behaviors over and above task performance (Organ & Ryan, 1995), researchers have begun to realize that contextual behaviors constitute a large portion of the job performance domain (Conway, 1999; Motowidlo & van Scotter, 1994; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002).

In assessing the adequacy of fit for the path model, we used Hu and Bentler’s (1999) criteria for model fit. The recommended cut-offs for fit indices are as follows: ≤ .09 for the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), ≥ .95 for the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and ≤ .06 for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Following this, alternative path models were specified and compared to the hypothesized path model in order to determine if the hypothesized model is preferred over the alternatives. As noted by Roberts and Pashler (2000), good statistical fit of an individual model reveals little about the likelihood of other outcomes, thus researchers should
compare their theoretically-derived target model to plausible alternative models with differing configurations of hypothesized relationships.

To investigate the theoretical plausibility of the target model, two alternative models were considered. The first alternative model suggested that role clarity only partially mediated the effects of feedback seeking on job performance by including a direct path from feedback seeking to job performance. A significant improvement in model fit of this alternative model over the target model would support the partial (versus complete) mediating effects of role clarity (Figure 2). Similarly, a second alternative model was specified wherein the feedback environment also had direct effects on feedback seeking in order to assess whether feedback orientation operated as a full or partial mediator of this relationship (Figure 3).

For all analyses, gender, age, and tenure were included as covariates. In the event of a significant interaction, procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991) were used to examine the form of the moderated relationship.

For the facet-level analyses, statistical analysis software (SPSS v 11.5.1; SPSS Inc., 2002) was employed for testing Hypotheses 8-15 via stepwise regression analyses. Using stepwise regression, the predictor variable with the strongest relationship with the criterion entered the equation first, followed by those with the highest partial correlations with the criterion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). In this way, a subset of independent variables that usefully predicted a criterion was developed and those that provide no additional prediction were eliminated.

Following this, exploratory regression analyses were conducted to examine whether the supervisor and coworker feedback environment composites accounted for
more variance in each facet of feedback orientation than the supervisor or coworker feedback environment facets as a group. For these analyses, the variance accounted for by the feedback environment facets as a set were compared to that accounted for by the feedback environment composite by examining the $R^2$ for each model.
Figure 2.

Alternative model with direct link from feedback seeking to job performance.

Note: FE = Feedback Environment; GO = Goal Orientation; FO = Feedback Orientation; FBS = Feedback Seeking; SSKL = Social Skill; RC = Role Clarity; JPERF = Job Performance.
Figure 3.

*Alternative model with direct link from the feedback environment to feedback seeking.*

Note: FE = Feedback Environment; GO = Goal Orientation; FO = Feedback Orientation; FBS = Feedback Seeking; SSKL = Social Skill; RC = Role Clarity; JPERF = Job Performance.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Sample Description

Two hundred ninety-three employed undergraduate students at a Midwestern university provided responses to subordinate surveys. The participants were all working part time at least 20 hours per week and gave the researcher permission to contact their supervisors to participate in the study. Supervisors returned a total of 214 surveys, yielding a response rate of 73%. The average age of the subordinate participants was 22.9 years old, women made up 71% of the sample, and 89% were Caucasian, 7.1% identified themselves as African American, and the remaining 4.9% classified themselves as Asian American, Hispanic American, or Other. The average job tenure for the subordinates was 22 months, and they worked on average 24 hours per week. Respondents represented a variety of organizations and job titles including service and sales, management, clerical, healthcare, and other. The average age of the supervisors was 39 years, and approximately 56.3% of this sample was female and 83% was Caucasian, 9% was African American, and the remaining 8% identified themselves as Asian American, Hispanic American, or Other. Supervisor organizational tenure averaged approximately 11 years. The average management tenure was seven years and two months. Supervisors had, on average, supervised the target employee for 24 months.
Data Screening and Cleaning.

Inspection of the dataset indicated that six cases required omission due to respondents’ supplying incomplete data. In these cases, data were missing at random as respondents neglected to supply data on entire scales with no discernable pattern.

Two additional cases were dropped because analyses indicated that these respondents represented univariate and multivariate outliers which unduly influenced results. In order to identify outliers, scale scores were screened using standardized residuals, Cook’s D, and Mahalanobis distance criteria. Observations that exceeded recommended cutoffs for these criteria (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996) and which were shown by scatterplots to unduly influence the results were omitted from further analyses.

Lastly, because respondents completed their portion of the study online, it was possible to capture survey administration duration. Those respondents completing the 104-item survey in less than 10 minutes were thought to represent a subsample of employed students who may not have thoughtfully responded to the survey, thereby providing data poor in quality. As a result, four other cases were excluded from further analyses.

After screening and cleaning the dataset according to the previous procedures, data from 202 participants were used for all remaining analyses.

Exploratory Factor Analyses of Feedback Seeking Measure.

Because this study employed a feedback seeking measure with a factor structure that has not been previously validated in the literature, EFA procedures were conducted to obtain factor structure and to determine if any items required deletion. Altogether, 16 items were included for analysis. Eight items were based on supervisor ratings of
subordinate feedback seeking (four items measured general feedback seeking and four items assessed normative feedback seeking) and eight items were based on subordinate self-ratings of general and normative feedback seeking (four items each). Analyses were carried out using structural equation modeling software (Mplus v 4.0; Muthén & Muthén, 2006) and statistical analysis software (SPSS v 11.5.1; SPSS Inc., 2002).

To begin with, O’Connor’s (2000) SPSS macro for the minimum average partial (MAP) test was used to assess dimensionality. Inspection of the average squared correlations demonstrated that variance accounted for continued to decline until a 2-factor solution was extracted, at which point average squared correlations began to account for increasing amounts of variance. Thus, a 2-factor solution best represents dimensionality according to the MAP test. Similarly, visual inspection of the scree plot suggests 2 factors as well (Kachigan, 1991). Additionally, parallel analysis (PA) was conducted in order to establish the number of factors to retain for rotation and interpretation (Lautenschlager, 1989). This technique generates random data with the same properties (i.e., equal sample size and number of variables) as the original data and subsequently subjects the random data to a factor analysis. According to this test, Kaiser criterion values indicate that 2 factors is the appropriate factor dimensionality.

To supplement these analyses, an exploratory factor analysis using an oblique method of rotation (promax) was carried out on the 16 items making up the feedback seeking scale. The factor pattern matrix was examined and any items with loadings of .40 or above were retained (Ford et al., 1986) while items with pattern coefficients less than .33 and items with their highest loading on a factor representing another dimension were
considered for deletion (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996). Lastly, we used the conventional factor loading cutoff of .40 to identify cross-loading items.

Results indicated that one normative feedback seeking item asked of supervisors (“Compared to your other employees, this employee often asks for an informal appraisal of how well he/she is doing on the job”) cross-loaded on the self-reported feedback seeking scale. However, this item was retained because its deletion did not result in a substantial increase in scale reliability (.83 vs. .82). Furthermore, this item’s loading on the supervisor feedback seeking dimension was substantially larger than its cross-loading on the self-reported feedback seeking dimension (.57 and .43, respectively).

Following exploratory factor analyses, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the 16 items comprising the two-factor feedback seeking scale. According to the obtained fit indices, results indicate strong factor loadings for all 16 items, however chi-square fit statistic and other fit indices indicated poor model fit ($\chi^2 (103)= 223.86, p < .001$; CFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.08). However, after minor modifications were made allowing four correlated error variances, each within the same subscale, the model fit the data well. While the chi-square test was statistically significant, ($\chi^2 (99)= 175.22, p < .001$), model fit was acceptable (CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.06), and all factor loadings were statistically significant (Figure 4).

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Existing Scales.**

All other measures used in the current study were from established, well-validated scales. Prior to assessing the measurement model, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the items of each of the established scales to ensure expected factor structure and factor form in the current sample. The CFAs were performed in Mplus v 4.0
Figure 4.

Confirmatory factor analysis results on feedback seeking measure.

Note. N1 = Normative Feedback Seeking Item #1; N2 = Normative Feedback Seeking Item #2; N3 = Normative Feedback Seeking Item #3; N4 = Normative Feedback Seeking Item #4; G1 = General Feedback Seeking Item #1; G2 = General Feedback Seeking Item #2; G3 = General Feedback Seeking Item #3; G4 = General Feedback Seeking Item #4.
(Muthén & Muthén, 2006) using maximum likelihood estimation. For these analyses, factor loadings were examined to identify items that needed to be dropped from further analyses. Criteria for item omission included item loadings less than .30 on their intended construct, cross-loadings of greater than .40, incremental improvement in fit indices after item deletion, and an increase in subscale reliability after item removal (Stevens, 1996; Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996).

In all, three items met the above criteria, all of which came from the Feedback Orientation scale. These items include item 1 from the accountability subscale and items 1 and 2 from the feedback self-efficacy subscale. The first accountability item (“It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance”) demonstrated a substantial cross-loading on the Utility subdimension. The first feedback self-efficacy item (“I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback) cross-loaded on both the accountability and social awareness subscales, while the second feedback self-efficacy item (“Compared to others, I am more competent at handling feedback”) cross-loaded only on the social awareness subscale. Examining the dataset used for validation of this construct (Grefe, 2006), however, revealed that these specific cross-loadings with these particular items are consistent with data collected and factor analyses undertaken in previous studies (Grefe, 2006). After dropping these items, CFA indicated that the remaining items positively and significantly loaded on their intended factor and demonstrated a high degree of simple structure, adequate fit indices, and acceptable reliabilities (Figure 5). As such, these items were dropped from further analyses.
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and bivariate correlations for the observed scale scores are presented in Table 1.
Figure 5.

*Confirmatory factor analysis model for Feedback Orientation.*
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 72 |
| 2  | SPE  | 82* | .94 |
| 3  | SPE  | .94 |
| 4  | SPE  | 82* | .94 |
| 5  | SPE  | .94 |
| 6  | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 7  | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 8  | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 9  | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 10 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 11 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 12 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 13 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 14 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 15 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 16 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 17 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 18 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 19 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 20 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 21 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 22 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 23 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 24 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 25 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 26 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 27 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |
| 28 | SPE  | 70* | .94 |

Note: SPE = Supervisor Feedback Environment; CTE = Coworker Feedback Environment; SC = Source Credibility; FQ = Feedback Quality; FD = Feedback Delivery; FP = Favorable Feedback; UF = Unfavorable Feedback; SA = Source Availability; FFS = Promotes Feedback Seeking; FO = Feedback Orientation; U = Utility; A = Accountability; SA = Social Awareness; SF = Self-Efficacy; LG = Learning Goal Orientation; PPO = Performance - Prime Orientation; PAO = Performance - Avoid Orientation; FBS = Feedback Seeking; RC = Role Clarity; SSKL = Social Skill; JP = Job Performance. * p < .05.

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities.
Path Model Testing

For model assessment, a path analysis was conducted with the aggregated scales (Byrne, 1994). Because the focal model required testing a fairly involved set of predictors, analyses were first carried out on a subset of the proposed relationships. For this submodel, the interactive effects of the feedback environment and the differing goal orientations on feedback orientation were assessed by specifying a recursive, just-identified path model that included the main effect variables, interaction terms, and covariates (age, tenure, and gender). The paths linking each covariate to feedback orientation were not significant. Furthermore, the path linking the performance prove X feedback environment interaction term to feedback orientation failed to attain significance as well. These non-significant paths were trimmed from the model. The resulting trimmed submodel is presented in Figure 6.

The full model was then tested, dropping the paths found to be non-significant in the submodel, but incorporating the remaining direct, indirect, and interactive effects. The standardized path estimates for this model indicated that the path linking the social skill X feedback seeking interaction was non-significant. Furthermore, the covariates did not have significant effects either. Thus, these paths were also trimmed from the model, shown in Figure 7. The resulting model fit the data poorly, $\chi^2(24) = 66.67, p < .05; \text{CFI} = .88; \text{RMSEA} = .08; \text{SRMR} = .10$. We then tested a revised model in which we added a direct path, based on modification indices, between feedback seeking and job performance (Figure 8). Allowing this path to be freely estimated resulted in a substantial improvement in model fit, $\chi^2(23) = 42.48, p < .05; \text{CFI} = .95; \text{RMSEA} = .06; \text{SRMR} = .07$ (Table 2) and demonstrated a significant increase in model fit over the a priori path.
Figure 6. Restricted model assessing the moderating effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation on feedback orientation.

Note: LGO = Learning goal orientation; PPGO = Performance-Prove goal orientation; PAGO = Performance-Avoid goal orientation; FE = Feedback environment; FE X LGO = Interactive feedback environment/ learning goal orientation term; FE X PAGO = Interactive feedback environment/ performance-avoid goal orientation term; FO = Feedback Orientation. All path coefficients shown are significant at $p < .05$. 
Figure 7.

*Full model assessing all hypothesized moderating and mediating effects.*

Note: LGO = Learning goal orientation; PPGO = Performance-Prove goal orientation; PAGO = Performance-Avoid goal orientation; FE = Feedback environment; FE X LGO = Interactive feedback environment/ learning goal orientation term; FE X PAGO = Interactive feedback environment/ performance-avoid goal orientation term; FO = Feedback Orientation. FBS = Feedback Seeking; SSKL = Social Skill; RC = Role Clarity; JPERF = Job Performance. All path coefficients shown are significant at $p < .05$. 
Figure 8. Full model assessing all hypothesized moderating and mediating effects and indirect effect of feedback seeking on job performance.

Note: LGO = Learning goal orientation; PPGO = Performance-Prove goal orientation; PAGO = Performance-Avoid goal orientation; FE = Feedback environment; FE X LGO = Interactive feedback environment/ learning goal orientation term; FE X PAGO = Interactive feedback environment/ performance-avoid goal orientation term; FO = Feedback Orientation. FBS = Feedback Seeking; SSKL = Social Skill; RC = Role Clarity; JPERF = Job Performance. All path coefficients shown are significant at $p < .05$. 

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Table 2

*Fit indices and statistics for the a priori and modified path and alternative models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta \chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Full</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Modified Full</td>
<td>42.48</td>
<td>24.19**</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alternative Model #2</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All analyses were carried out on $N = 202$. CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation; **$p<.01$. 
model $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 24.19, p < .01$. Thus, the modified path model indicates that the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance may be partially mediated by role clarity. These results will be discussed further in the section devoted to path model hypothesis testing.

Given a reasonably well-fitting path model, alternative path models based on the literature were to be specified and compared to the hypothesized path model in order to determine if the hypothesized model fits the data better than the alternatives. The first alternative model (Figure 2) was to test whether feedback seeking has direct effects on job performance (i.e., whether role clarity acts as a partial mediator). As indicated by the path model analyses executed in the previous section (Figure 8), a significant improvement in model fit was found when role clarity was specified to partially, rather than fully, mediate the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance. Because testing the first alternative model was equivalent to the assessment of the modified path model, and because this model provided a better fit to the data over the hypothesized path model (Table 2), these results provide support for the alternative model outlined in Figure 2.

The second alternative model assessed whether the feedback environment had direct effects on feedback seeking independent of feedback orientation (Figure 3). This model was tested by regressing feedback seeking on both feedback orientation and the feedback environment. Because the alternative and target models are hierarchically related, the chi-square difference test was used to test whether a significant improvement in model fit occurred as a result of the inclusion of a path between the feedback
environment and feedback seeking. As shown in Table 2, the alternative model did not result in a significant improvement in model fit, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 2.67, p = ns$.

Path Model Hypotheses Tests

The modified path model in Figure 8 was used to test Hypotheses 1 through 7. To assess all three hypotheses, fit statistics and path coefficients were examined. However, supplemental mediational analysis for Hypothesis 6 were carried out using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) criteria for mediation and Sobel analyses.

*Hypothesis 1.* Hypothesis 1 proposed that perceptions of a supportive feedback environment are positively related to feedback orientation. In support of this hypothesis, as shown in Figure 8, the path estimate between perceptions of a supportive feedback environment and feedback orientation was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .34, p < .05$).

*Hypotheses 2, 3, 4.* Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 respectively proposed that learning goal orientation, performance-prove goal orientation, and performance-avoid goal orientation would moderate the feedback environment/feedback orientation relationship. Specifically, Hypothesis 2 stated that the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation would be moderated by learning goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in learning goal orientation. Hypothesis 3 proposed that this link would be moderated by performance-prove goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in performance-prove goal orientation. Lastly, Hypothesis 4 postulated that this relationship would be moderated by performance-avoid goal orientation such that this positive link is weaker for those higher in performance-avoid goal orientation.

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Results of these analyses provided support for Hypotheses 2. As shown in Figure
8, in addition to the previously-reported main effect for the feedback environment,
learning goal orientation was found to have main effects on feedback orientation ($\beta = .34,
p < .05$). Furthermore, the path linking the feedback environment and learning goal
orientation interaction term was statistically significant ($\beta = -.18, p < .05$), indicating that
the interaction term accounted for additional variance over and above that of the main
effects alone, thus supporting Hypothesis 2.

Using procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), the observed interaction
was plotted to examine the form of the moderated relationship. Figure 9 illustrates the
interaction between perceptions of a supportive feedback environment and learning goal
orientation on feedback orientation for values $\pm 1$ standard deviation around the mean of
the feedback environment. As expected, there is a steeper positive slope describing the
relationship between perceptions of the feedback environment and feedback orientation
for those with lower levels of learning goal orientation. Conversely, the slope is still
positive but weaker for those with higher levels of learning goal orientation. These results
indicate that for those with lower levels of learning goal orientation, a supportive
feedback environment may foster higher levels of feedback orientation. However, those
with high levels of learning goal orientation seem to be feedback-oriented regardless of
environment support for feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 3, in which performance-prove goal orientation was examined as a
moderator of the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback
orientation, was tested in the manner outlined above. As shown in Figure 8, in addition to
the main effect for feedback environment, performance-prove goal orientation was found
to have a main effect on feedback orientation ($\beta = .19, p < .05$). However, the path linking the interaction of feedback environment and performance-prove goal orientation failed to attain statistical significance, indicating that the interaction term did not account for additional variance over and above that of the main effects alone. These results indicate that performance-prove goal orientation does positively relate to feedback orientation, however, it does interact with the feedback environment to influence feedback orientation. Thus, this hypothesis is not supported.

Next, performance-avoid goal orientation was examined as a moderator of the feedback environment/feedback orientation link. As can be seen in Figure 8, in addition to the main effect for the feedback environment, the main effect for performance-avoid goal orientation was significant ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). Furthermore, the interaction term was also statistically significant ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$), indicating that the interaction term accounted for additional variance over and above that of the main effects alone, thus supporting Hypothesis 4. Plotting the interaction (Aiken & West, 1991) illustrates the form of the interaction between perceptions of a supportive feedback environment and performance-avoid goal orientation on feedback orientation (Figure 10). As expected, the positive link between perceptions of the feedback environment and feedback orientation is weaker for those with higher levels of performance-avoid goal orientation. However, the slope is stronger for those with lower levels of performance-avoid goal orientation. These results suggest that those with lower levels of performance-avoid goal orientation are more feedback-oriented relative to those with higher levels. Furthermore, an environment conducive to feedback seeking seems to elevate levels of feedback orientation for those low in performance avoid goal orientation, whereas no effects for a
supportive feedback environment on feedback orientation are found for those high in performance-avoid goal orientation. Overall, the feedback environment, the three main effect for goal orientation, and the two significant interactions of the feedback environment with learning goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation accounted for 52% of the variance in feedback orientation.
Figure 9. The interaction of the feedback environment and learning goal orientation on feedback orientation.
Figure 10. The interaction of the feedback environment and performance-avoid goal orientation on feedback orientation.
Hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 5 proposed that feedback orientation is positively related to feedback seeking. In support of this hypothesis, the path estimate between feedback orientation is positively related to feedback seeking and feedback seeking was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .18, p < .05$).

Hypothesis 6. Hypothesis 6 stated that role clarity would mediate the effects of feedback seeking on job performance. Modifications indices generated during analysis of the a priori path model indicated the presence of a direct path from feedback seeking to job performance, suggesting that role clarity acts as a partial mediator of this relationship.

To provide supplemental information regarding mediation, this hypothesis was tested using the three-step mediated regression procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). With this approach, three conditions must be met in order to establish mediation. First, the independent variable must be related to the proposed mediator. As shown in Table 1, feedback seeking is significantly related to role clarity ($r = .23, p < .05$). Therefore, the first condition is met. Second, the independent variable must be related to the dependent variable. Table 1 demonstrates that feedback seeking has a strong positive relationship with job performance ($r = .47, p < .05$). Lastly, the effect of feedback seeking on job performance must be significantly reduced or disappear altogether when considered simultaneously with the mediator. As this analysis reveals, the relationship between feedback seeking on job performance is partially mediated by role clarity, since the direct effect of feedback seeking on job performance gets smaller (from .47 to .43), yet remains statistically significant with the inclusion of role clarity in the model (Table 3).
In order to test whether the observed indirect effect is statistically different from zero, a Sobel test was carried out using obtained mediator parameters from the regression of job performance on role clarity controlling for feedback seeking ($\beta = .24, SE = .07$) and the regression of role clarity on feedback seeking ($\beta = .23, SE = .06$). In this procedure, the ratio of the unstandardized direct effect and its accompanying standard error are computed and compared to a $z$-distribution to determine statistical significance. Results of the Sobel test indicate that the indirect effect ($\alpha\beta = .05$) was statistically significant ($z = 2.56, p < .05$). According to MacKinnon, Krull, and Lockwood (2000), given statistically significant positive direct and indirect effect, in conjunction with the above analyses, these results suggest a consistent, partial mediating effect. Taken together, the structural model, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) mediational criteria, and Sobel analysis provide evidence that role clarity partially mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance. Because role clarity partially, rather than fully, mediated this relationship, Hypothesis 6 is partially supported.

**Hypothesis 7.** Hypothesis 7 assessed social skill as a moderator of the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. As shown in Figure 8, feedback seeking and social skill both demonstrated main effects ($\beta = .19$ and $\beta = .24$, respectively; $p < .05$). However, the interaction term did not account for any additional variance over and above that of the main effects. These results indicate that both feedback seeking and social skill are positively related to role clarity, however, social skill does not moderate the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. As such, Hypothesis 7 is not supported.
Table 3

*Sobel Analysis of the Mediating Influence of Role Clarity on Feedback Seeking and Job Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV: Job Performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Feedback Seeking</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.47**</td>
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<td>Feedback Seeking</td>
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<td>.43**</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role Clarity</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV: Role Clarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Feedback Seeking</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: DV = Dependent variable
**p < .01.*
Facet-level Analyses and Hypothesis Testing.

For the facet-level analyses, stepwise regressions were performed in which each feedback orientation facet was regressed on either the supervisor or coworker feedback environment dimensions to test Hypotheses 8-15. In order to examine the viability of the multidimensional perspective, immediately following analyses involving each feedback orientation subdimension, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine whether the supervisor and coworker feedback environment composites accounted for more variance in each facet of feedback orientation than the supervisor or coworker feedback environment facets as a group by examining the $R^2$ for each model.

Hypotheses 8 and 9. Hypothesis 8 stated that perceptions of supervisor source credibility, feedback quality, and availability would emerge as significant predictors of utility. As shown in Table 4, in order of predictive power, feedback quality, favorable feedback, and source credibility were found to be significantly related to utility, $R^2 = 27.3\%$. Because availability failed to attain significance, this hypothesis is partially supported. Hypothesis 9 postulated that perceptions of coworker source credibility, feedback quality, and availability would emerge as significant predictors of utility. Table 4 indicates that feedback quality and favorable feedback emerged as significant predictors, accounting for 17.6\% of the variance in utility. Because feedback quality was the only hypothesized predictor to attain significance, this hypothesis is partially supported.

Comparison of the variance accounted for by the set of supervisor environment facets to that of the composite supervisor feedback environment variable indicated that
the individual facets account for more variance in utility than the composite ($R^2 = 27.3\%$ and $R^2 = 19.8\%$, respectively). Similarly, the model using individual coworker environment facets to predict utility accounted for more variance than the composite coworker feedback environment variable ($R^2 = 17.6\%$ and $R^2 = 15.6\%$, respectively).

*Hypotheses 10 and 11.* Hypothesis 10 stated that supervisor feedback favorability and unfavorable feedback would significantly predict accountability. As illustrated by Table 5, feedback quality and promotion of feedback seeking were found to emerge as significant predictors of accountability, $R^2 = 14.8\%$. However, because neither hypothesized predictor emerged as significant, this hypothesis is not supported.

Hypothesis 11 stated that coworker feedback favorability and unfavorable feedback would emerge as significant predictors of accountability. Table 5 indicates that feedback delivery and unfavorable feedback emerged as significant predictors, accounting for 7.0% of the variance in accountability. However, because unfavorable feedback was the only hypothesized predictor to attain significance, this hypothesis is partially supported.

Assessing the relative predictive power of the set of supervisor environment facets to that of the composite supervisor feedback environment variable demonstrate that the individual supervisor environment facets, as a set, account for more variance in accountability than the composite ($R^2 = 14.8\%$ and $R^2 = 11.0\%$, respectively). Furthermore, the coworker environment facets were found to slightly predict accountability better than the composite coworker feedback environment variable ($R^2 = 7.0\%$ and $R^2 = 6.5\%$, respectively).

*Hypotheses 12 and 13.* Hypothesis 12 stated that supervisor promotion of feedback seeking would emerge as a significant predictor of social awareness. As shown
in Table 6, supervisor feedback quality was the only predictor found to be significantly related to social awareness, $R^2 = 3.7\%$. Because promotion of feedback seeking failed to attain significance, this hypothesis is not supported. Hypothesis 13 stated that coworker promotion of feedback seeking would emerge as a significant predictor of social awareness. Table 6 indicates that coworker feedback quality was the sole significant predictor of social awareness, accounting for 8.8% of the variance. However, because coworker promotion of feedback seeking did not attain significance, this hypothesis is unsupported.

Comparison of the predictive power of the set of supervisor environment facets to that of the composite supervisor feedback environment variable indicated that the individual facets account for slightly more variance in social awareness than the composite ($R^2 = 3.7\%$ and $R^2 = 2.7\%$, respectively). Similarly, the model using individual coworker environment facets to predict social awareness accounted for more variance than the composite coworker feedback environment variable ($R^2 = 8.8\%$ and $R^2 = 5.6\%$, respectively).

*Hypotheses 14 and 15.* Hypothesis 14 stated that supervisor feedback delivery would emerge as a significant predictor of feedback self-efficacy. As illustrated by Table 7, source credibility and unfavorable feedback were found to emerge as significant predictors of feedback self-efficacy, $R^2 = 14.6\%$. Because the hypothesized predictor did not emerge as significant, this hypothesis is not supported. Hypothesis 15 stated that coworker feedback delivery would emerge as a significant predictor of feedback self-efficacy. Table 7 indicates that coworker promotion of feedback seeking and unfavorable feedback emerged as significant predictors, accounting for 9.5% of the variance in
feedback self-efficacy. However, because feedback coworker feedback delivery failed to attain significance as a predictor of feedback self-efficacy, this hypothesis is not supported.

Comparison of the variance accounted for by the set of supervisor environment facets to that of the composite supervisor feedback environment variable indicated that the individual facets account for more variance in feedback self-efficacy than the composite ($R^2 = 14.6\%$ and $R^2 = 9.6\%$, respectively). Similarly, the model using individual coworker environment facets to predict feedback self-efficacy accounted for slightly more variance than the composite coworker feedback environment variable ($R^2 = 9.5\%$ and $R^2 = 7.7\%$, respectively).

Overall, using the extant feedback seeking literature to derive facet-level hypotheses, results indicated that the theoretically appropriate subdimensions of the supervisor and coworker feedback environments predicted specific facets of feedback orientation with moderate success. However, when all supervisor or coworker feedback environment subdimensions were used simultaneously to predict a feedback orientation facet, oftentimes predictors other than those hypothesized emerged as significant. Indeed, one feedback environment facet in particular - feedback quality - routinely emerged as a significant predictor. This important finding will be further explored in the Discussion section. Further, oftentimes the set of individual facets accounted for more variance in a particular dimension of feedback orientation, but in many instances this additional increment was quite small.
Table 4

*Stepwise Regression Analyses of the Supervisor and Coworker Feedback Environment on Utility for Hypotheses 8 and 9.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor FE variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Coworker FE variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
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</table>

$R^2 = 27.3\%$  $R^2 = 17.6\%$

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SFE Composite</th>
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<th>8.10</th>
<th>CFE Composite</th>
<th>.39***</th>
<th>7.03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

$R^2 = 19.8\%$  $R^2 = 15.6\%$

*Note: DV = Dependent variable; FE = Feedback Environment; SC = Source Credibility; FQ = Feedback Quality; FD = Feedback Delivery; FF = Favorable Feedback; UF = Unfavorable Feedback; SA = Source Availability; PFS = Promotes Feedback Seeking; SFE = Supervisor Feedback Environment; CFE = Coworker Feedback Environment.*

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$. 
### Table 5

**Stepwise Regression Analyses of the Supervisor and Coworker Feedback Environment on Accountability for Hypotheses 10 and 11.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV = Accountability</th>
<th>Supervisor FE variables</th>
<th>Coworker FE variables</th>
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<tr>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>UF</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>0.18***</td>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = 14.8\%$  $R^2 = 7.0\%$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFE Composite</th>
<th>0.32***</th>
<th>5.96</th>
<th>CFE Composite</th>
<th>0.26***</th>
<th>4.39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

$R^2 = 11.0\%$  $R^2 = 6.5\%$

**Note:** DV = Dependent variable; FE = Feedback Environment; SC = Source Credibility; FQ = Feedback Quality; FD = Feedback Delivery; FF = Favorable Feedback; UF = Unfavorable Feedback; SA = Source Availability; PFS = Promotes Feedback Seeking; SFE = Supervisor Feedback Environment; CFE = Coworker Feedback Environment.

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.**
Table 6

Stepwise Regression Analyses of the Supervisor and Coworker Feedback Environment on Social Awareness for Hypotheses 12 and 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV = Social Awareness</th>
<th>Supervisor FE variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Coworker FE variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FF</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>FF</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UF</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>UF</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = 3.7\%$  \hspace{2cm}  $R^2 = 8.8\%$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFE Composite</th>
<th>.17**</th>
<th>2.89</th>
<th>CFE Composite</th>
<th>.25***</th>
<th>4.08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                     | $R^2 = 19.8\%$  \hspace{2cm}  $R^2 = 5.6\%$

Note: DV = Dependent variable; FE = Feedback Environment; SC = Source Credibility; FQ = Feedback Quality; FD = Feedback Delivery; FF = Favorable Feedback; UF = Unfavorable Feedback; SA = Source Availability; PFS = Promotes Feedback Seeking; SFE = Supervisor Feedback Environment; CFE = Coworker Feedback Environment.  

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.
Table 7

Stepwise Regression Analyses of the Supervisor and Coworker Feedback Environment on Feedback Self-efficacy for Hypotheses 14 and 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor FE variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Coworker FE variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FD</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.66</td>
<td>FF</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UF</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>UF</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>PFS</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 = 14.6\% \quad R^2 = 9.5\% \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFE Composite</th>
<th>.31***</th>
<th>5.38</th>
<th>CFE Composite</th>
<th>.30***</th>
<th>4.70</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ R^2 = 9.6% ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[ R^2 = 7.7% ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DV = Dependent variable; FE = Feedback Environment; SC = Source Credibility; FQ = Feedback Quality; FD = Feedback Delivery; FF = Favorable Feedback; UF = Unfavorable Feedback; SA = Source Availability; PFS = Promotes Feedback Seeking; SFE = Supervisor Feedback Environment; CFE = Coworker Feedback Environment.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

With the current emphasis on employee self-development, continuous learning, and the need for employees to successfully respond to a constantly changing work environment (London & Smither, 2002), performance feedback has become increasingly important for the regulation of work-related behavior. Whereas research has begun to examine the influence of the feedback environment on critical individual and organizational outcomes (Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Rosen, et al., 2006; Steelman & Levy, 2001), very little research has investigated how the feedback environment impacts job performance through feedback seeking behavior. Thus, the primary purpose of the current study was to develop a model (Figure 1) explicating the underlying mechanisms linking the feedback environment to feedback-seeking behavior and assess role clarity and social skill as intervening variables between feedback seeking and job performance. A secondary purpose of this study was to disaggregate the feedback environment and feedback orientation domains and explore the relationships between individual facets of each multidimensional construct in order to assess whether there are particular feedback environment facets that relate especially well to specific subdimensions of feedback orientation.
For the most part, the key mediational and moderated relationships outlined in the a priori model were supported. Data collected from 202 supervisor/subordinate dyads indicated that the feedback environment influenced job performance through several mechanisms. More specifically, perceptions of a supportive feedback environment influenced one’s feedback orientation, which in turn, influenced the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking. Furthermore, the link between the feedback environment and feedback orientation was moderated by learning goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation, however, no moderating effects were found for performance-prove orientation. In addition, whereas role clarity was found to partially mediate the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance, the link between feedback seeking and role clarity was not moderated by social skill. For the facet-level analyses, the links that drew upon the existing feedback seeking literature (where individual facets of the supervisor and coworker feedback environments were specified to link to an individual feedback orientation facet) were somewhat supported.

The Feedback Environment and Feedback Orientation

Several empirical studies have now shown that creating a context in which active feedback seeking behavior is supported by feedback sources may counteract cost perceptions associated with feedback seeking and increase the expectancy value of feedback seeking (Levy et al., 1995; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker, et al., in press; Williams et al., 1999). Previous empirical work has demonstrated that positive and reinforcing experiences with feedback resulting from a supportive feedback environment shape an individual’s feedback orientation (Grefe, 2006). The current study replicated these findings by showing that a workplace environment that fosters feedback seeking
and provides readily available, credible, and frequent feedback contributes to employee’s development of a favorable orientation towards feedback.

The Interaction of the Feedback Environment and Goal Orientation on Feedback Orientation

Recently, feedback theorists have called for an examination of how personality variables interact with the feedback environment to influence the frequency with which one engages in the feedback seeking process (Levy et al., 1995; Morrison, 2002). At a finer level, others have suggested that broad individual differences interact with the feedback environment to evoke a feedback-specific trait (i.e., a feedback orientation), which in turn influences the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior (Herold & Fedor, 1996; London & Smither, 2002). However, to date, there are no published studies that have examined the interactive effects of the feedback environment and broad personality variables on feedback orientation.

In the present study, moderation within a path analytic framework was used to assess whether goal orientation moderates that relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation. Employees with a high learning goal orientation view skills as malleable and make efforts not only to achieve current tasks but also to develop the ability to accomplish future tasks (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). High learning goal orientation prompts proactive feedback seeking as a means to gather information regarding skill development and task mastery (VandeWalle et al., 2000). Learning goal orientation was proposed and found to interact with the feedback environment such that the link between the feedback environment and feedback orientation was weaker for those higher in learning goal orientation (Figure 9). Examining the form of the moderated
relationship confirms this study’s rationale for this hypothesis; those high in learning goal orientation are feedback oriented regardless of feedback environment supportiveness, however the feedback orientation of those low in learning goal orientation is positively influenced by a supportive feedback environment.

Employees with a high performance-prove goal orientation tend to focus on performance and try to demonstrate their ability by looking better than others and avoiding negative outcomes (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). It differs from learning goal orientation in that it is fundamentally aversive and threat-based, however, people with a higher performance-prove goal orientation are motivated to take actions to outperform and differentiate themselves from others. Thus, we expected performance-prove goal orientation to moderate the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation in the same way that learning goal orientation moderated this relationship. In other words, this link was expected to be weaker for those higher in performance-prove goal orientation. Whereas main effects were for both the feedback environment and performance-prove goal orientation, this interaction was not significant.

In contrast to learning and performance-prove orientations, performance-avoid goal orientation prompts people to adopt maladaptive patterns of behavior that preclude optimal self-regulation (Elliot & Church, 1997). Specifically, performance-avoid goal orientation distracts employees from devoting energy to self-regulation and focuses more narrowly and passively on avoiding failures; thus, those with a performance-avoid orientation see little instrumental value in self-regulation tactics. Accordingly, the current study hypothesized and found that performance-avoid goal orientation moderates the feedback-environment/feedback orientation link such that this link is weaker for those
with higher levels of performance-avoid goal orientation (Figure 10). According to these results, an environment conducive to feedback seeking influenced the feedback orientation of those with low levels of performance-avoid goal orientation. However, the feedback environment did not affect the feedback orientation of those with high levels of performance-avoid goal orientation, presumably, because these employees see little value in self-regulation.

Traditionally, research investigating the effects of goal orientation has studied only two types of goal orientation, with results generally showing the positive effects of learning goal orientation on self-regulation tactics and negative or neutral effects of performance goal orientation (Button, et al., 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Norris-Watts, 2004; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, et al., 2000). However, parsing performance goal orientation into performance-prove and performance-avoid orientation, as suggested by several goal orientation researchers (Attenweiler & Moore, 2006; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996; Reichard, 2001; Siejts, et al., 2004; VandeWalle, 1997), resulted in differential effects by goal orientation.

For example, main effects on feedback orientation were found for learning, performance-prove, and performance-avoid orientation and interestingly, the direction and magnitude of the relationships were as theory would predict; a strong, positive, and significant relationship was found for the learning goal orientation/feedback orientation link; a weaker, yet positive and significant relationship was found for performance-prove and feedback orientation; lastly, a negative, significant relationship was found for performance-avoid and feedback orientation (Table 1). Thus, while the generally supportive findings for learning goal orientation were replicated in this study, the effects
for performance goal orientation were dependent upon performance goal orientation subdimension. Specifically, the deleterious effects of performance goals on feedback orientation were found only for those who characteristically adopt performance-avoid goals. These results suggest that one’s defining goal orientation creates a framework for how he or she interprets and evaluates the importance of success-relevant information.

Furthermore, in accordance with feedback researchers who argue that individual characteristics influence and shape the effects of the feedback environment (Herold & Fedor, 1996; Levy et al., 1995; London & Smither, 2002; Morrison, 2002), the results of this study demonstrate that goal orientation may systematically influence how employees respond to the feedback environment to ultimately influence the extent to which they place value on performance feedback and feedback seeking. As expected, for those higher in learning goal orientation, an environment characterized by high quality, available feedback and open encouragement of feedback seeking had no effect on feedback orientation. In other words, those high in learning goal orientation are feedback oriented regardless of the ambient support for feedback seeking. According to achievement motivation theory, those with high levels of learning goal orientation are intrinsically (rather than externally) motivated to perceive achievement settings as challenging. As a result, these employees are more cognitively and affectively invested in achievement, which orients the individual toward the presence of mastery-relevant information (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996). The results of the current study are consistent with the notion that those high in learning goal orientation manifest their own interest in task mastery and need not rely on the feedback environment to provide them with such motivation.
Those characterized by elevated levels of performance-prove goal orientation are also oriented towards positive outcomes (e.g., positive feedback regarding normative performance), however, performance-prove goal orientation did not interact with the feedback environment to influence feedback orientation. While both learning and performance-prove goal orientation facilitate task concentration and intrinsic motivation, as noted by some researchers (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996), they may not always elicit the same motivational processes or lead to identical outcomes. For example, in contexts wherein normative feedback is not freely dispensed, motivation to seek feedback may be reduced for those high in performance-prove goal orientation. That is, if the external evaluations that motivate those with a performance-prove goal orientation are generally withheld or if the active solicitation of such information is discouraged (e.g., in a non-supportive feedback environment), task involvement, affective investment, and intrinsic motivation toward the attainment of competence may be disrupted. In this case, a non-supportive feedback environment would reduce levels of feedback orientation for those with a performance-prove goal orientation and, as shown in this study, lead to significant main effects for performance-prove goal orientation on feedback orientation, yet a non-significant interaction of performance-prove goal orientation and feedback environment on feedback orientation.

For those high in performance-avoid goal orientation, the prospect of potential failure elicits anxiety and orients the employee toward the presence of failure-relevant information (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliott & Haraskiewicz, 1996). This study’s results are in accordance with achievement motivation theory and demonstrate that performance-avoid oriented employees see so little value and instrumentality in self-regulatory
activities that a supportive feedback environment has very little or no effect on feedback orientation. That is, seemingly no amount of advocacy for the act of feedback seeking can serve to catalyze the development of feedback orientation in these employees.

Overall, these results indicate the feedback environment and goal orientation interact such that a) a supportive feedback environment does not dramatically influence the feedback orientation of those with a learning goal orientation as these employees are intrinsically feedback oriented, b) a non-supportive feedback environment may undermine the motivation of those with a performance-prove goal orientation, and c) those with performance-avoid goal orientation do not become feedback-oriented despite a culture espousing the benefits of feedback seeking. Practical implications for these findings are discussed in the Implications and Future Research section.

*Feedback Orientation and Feedback Seeking*

Since Ashford and Cummings’ (1983) suggestion that individuals actively seek feedback, many empirical studies have demonstrated the potential impact of tolerance for ambiguity, feedback propensity, public self-consciousness, cultural differences, self-esteem, and goal orientation on feedback seeking (Bennett, et al., 1990; Fedor, et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1995; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990 Norris-Watts, 2004; Tuckey, et al., 2002; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, et al., 2000). The current study examined feedback orientation as an important individual difference variable in the prediction of feedback seeking behavior. Operationalizing feedback orientation using Grefe’s (2006) newly-validated multidimensional measure, this study replicated Grefe’s results by demonstrating that feedback orientation predicts feedback seeking behavior.
These results suggest that an individual’s overall receptivity to feedback predicts the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior. Furthermore, the feedback-specific nature of this feedback orientation and its constituent dimensions make it particularly valuable for identifying and understanding how individual differences influence the feedback process. Developing and testing theoretically-derived individual difference variables specific to the area of feedback may produce stronger and more consistent relationships with feedback relevant outcomes, such as feedback seeking (Azjen & Fishbein, 1977).

*Feedback Seeking and Job Performance*

To date, very little research exists examining the effects of feedback seeking on job performance. Bivariate research investigating this relationship has resulted in inconsistent findings (Ang et al., 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Porath & Bateman, 2006), leading some to call for research examining potential intervening mechanisms (e.g., Ashford, et al., 2003). Because uncertainty reduction represents a well-documented instrumental outcome of feedback seeking (Ashford et al., 2003; Taylor, et al., 1984), the current study employed role clarity as a potential mediating mechanism between feedback seeking and job performance. In the present study, modifications to the path model (Figure 8) and Sobel analyses (Table 3) indicated that feedback seeking had a direct effect on job performance and that role clarity partially mediated this relationship. These results suggest that feedback seeking leads to the attainment of performance- and job-related information, in turn, reducing perceived role ambiguity and leading to incremental gains in performance. However, they also indicate that feedback seeking
behavior influences job performance independent of role clarity. This direct effect may come from several sources.

For example, feedback seeking may also influence job performance through impression management tactics. The motive to manage other’s positive impressions is a critical consideration in the decision to engage in feedback seeking (Morrison & Bies, 1991). Several studies have now found that impression management tactics influence rater liking, which in turn influences actual performance ratings (e.g., Wayne & Liden, 1995; Villanova & Bernardin, 1989). Thus, the direct effect for feedback seeking on job performance found in the current study may indicate that subordinates sometimes sought feedback seeking as a means to manage impressions rather clarify job goals or processes and these behaviors ultimately influenced supervisor ratings of performance.

Furthermore, feedback seeking may be linked to job performance through other variables not considered in this study. For example, some research indicates that the act of feedback seeking itself may influence motivation to perform. Renn and Fedor (2001) found that feedback seeking improved job performance through increased personal goal setting on the part of the employee. These personal improvement goals, in turn, increased both work quantity and quality. Additionally, Ashford and Black (1996) argued that feedback seeking may lead to heightened feelings of control and personal competence over one’s work environment, in turn motivating those who frequently seek feedback to perform well. These studies indicate that important outcomes of feedback seeking exist (other than role clarity) and likely mediate the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance.
Social Skill as a Moderator

Due to conflicting findings in the literature regarding role clarity as a mediator of the link between feedback seeking and job performance (Brown et al., 2001; Whitaker et al., in press), the current study proposed that social skill should moderate the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. This study postulated that feedback seeking leads to heightened levels of role clarity, particularly for those who can successfully engage feedback sources in the feedback exchange in order to garner the required information needed to clarify organizational roles and responsibilities – in other words, those high in social skill. Whereas main effects were found for both feedback seeking and social skill (Figure 8), the interaction was not significant. These results suggest that despite the non-significant moderation, the ability to effectively read and understand social interaction influences role clarity over and above feedback seeking. Social skill is a social effectiveness construct pertaining to one’s ability to perceive useful information, communicate well, and engage in socially effective behavior allowing people to achieve social and organizational goals (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). The results of this study suggest that employees with this ability may gain an understanding of role requirements and knowledge of important organizational goals and processes independent of active elicitation of feedback regarding this knowledge.

Researchers have come to conceptualize role clarity as a dynamic process wherein expectations applied to the employee and his or her position are in a constant state of flux (Sawyer, 1992; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoades, 1996). According to Kahn, et al. (1964), employees must continually interact with their environment in order to gain the requisite knowledge to fulfill his or her responsibilities. While many employees may engage in
direct feedback inquiry in order to remain continuously updated on ever-changing role requirements, those high in social skill may gain role clarity not only through interactive feedback seeking, but also through the effective monitoring of the changing workplace environment for important cues regarding necessary adjustments to work behavior. Feedback monitoring is an indirect method of attaining feedback information that involves observation of the environment for important indications from others pertaining to how well one is carrying out responsibilities, and how well one is performing in a normative sense (Ashford et al., 2004). Those higher in social skill likely interpret these indirect feedback messages more readily and more accurately than those with lower levels of social skill, adjust one’s behavior to different situational demands, and develop a clear sense of role requirements through perceptive monitoring of the changing workplace. Future research should assess whether those higher in social skill monitor the workplace environment for performance cues to a greater degree, and with greater success, than others.

Whereas social skill is believed to be partially dispositional, researchers also agree that social skill is largely learned (Murtha, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996; Witt & Ferris, 2003). The results of the current study suggest that social skill may be an important component for successful self-regulation in dynamic settings and underscore the practical importance of formal training efforts designed to enhance the social competencies and strategies of employees.

Facet-level analyses

Utility. In examining the relationships between specific facets of the supervisor feedback environment and feedback orientation, stepwise regression analyses indicated
that supervisor feedback quality, source credibility, and favorable feedback positively related to the utility dimension of feedback orientation. These results for feedback quality are in accordance with the findings of Brett and Atwater (2001) and Makiney and Levy (1998), who found that consistent and useful feedback motivates employees to accept, seek, and use feedback. The results of this analysis imply that employees may seek out and utilize useful feedback preferentially because it aids in skill development, goal attainment, and helps define successful performance.

Furthermore, because source credibility has some grounding in existing empirical research supporting its links with utility (Brett and Atwater, 2001), its emergence as a significant predictor is not surprising. Brett and Atwater’s (2001) results suggest that feedback from a trustworthy, competent supervisor may be seen as instrumental for the attainment of important outcomes. These results are largely mirrored in the current study.

Lastly, favorable feedback emerged as significant predictors of utility. At a conceptual level, this component should relate to utility. Utility is defined as an individual’s tendency to believe that feedback is instrumental in achieving goals or obtaining desired outcomes at work (Grefe, 2006). Feedback favorability is concerned with praising performance when appropriate through positive feedback whereas unfavorable feedback involves the consistent provision of negative feedback when a subordinate’s performance levels drop below expectations (Steelman et al, 2004). As such, the provision of appropriate praise and warnings should provide employees with information that helps them determine which behaviors are expected and rewarded by the organization and which are deemed unacceptable.
For the coworker feedback environment, it was found that feedback quality was the dominant predictor. These results are consistent with Makiney and Levy’s (1998) results demonstrating that individuals who believed that feedback from peers was useful and credible were more likely to use this peer-supplied feedback when making ratings about an employee. The results of the Makiney and Levy study combined with the results of the current study indicate that coworkers who are viewed as having some expertise and are seen as competent feedback sources may provide feedback that is seen as high in utility.

Practically speaking, these results indicate that organizational practitioners may elevate perceptions of feedback utility by targeting for intervention specific aspects of the supervisor and coworker feedback environment. According to the results presented here, if organizations can positively influence the extent to which employees believe supervisors and coworkers possess accurate and useful knowledge, the ease with which one is able to locate and utilize supervisors as feedback sources, and the frequency with which supervisors and coworkers provide positive feedback when warranted, employee perceptions of feedback instrumentality may increase in tandem.

Accountability. Stepwise regression analyses indicated that supervisor feedback quality and promotion of feedback seeking positively predicted accountability. Hence, despite Walker and Smither’s (1999) findings indicating that greater frequency of favorable and unfavorable feedback should signal to employees the importance of utilizing feedback to modify work-related behavior, both of these hypothesized predictors failed to attain significance when all subfacets were considered simultaneously. Instead, supervisor feedback quality emerged as the most important predictor of accountability.
While this link was not indicated by past feedback seeking literature, feedback quality should theoretically link to accountability. Accountability refers to an individual’s tendency to feel a sense of obligation to act on feedback (Grefe, 2006). According to Ilgen et al. (1979), the informational value of feedback clarifies individuals' roles in organizations and serves as a motivational function when it provides information about outcomes associated with rewards. Thus, consistent, accurate, and useful feedback may either implicitly or explicitly convey messages regarding progress toward goal attainment and its associated rewards, in turn motivating employees to put the feedback received to use in order to secure valued rewards.

Furthermore, supervisor promotion of feedback was also found to predict perceptions of feedback accountability. As shown by several researchers, sources that encourage feedback seeking and willingly provide timely feedback likely influence the degree to which one feels comfortable seeking feedback (Levy et al., 1995; Williams et al., 1999). However, it may also be the case that open encouragement of feedback seeking may signal to employees that the organization not only supports feedback seeking, but also views its use as an organizational imperative. This may lead employees to feel not only comfortable with feedback seeking, but at least to some degree, responsible for feedback seeking and responding to feedback. Future research should investigate the links between active promotion of feedback seeking and the extent to which employees feel accountable for seeking and feedback utilization.

For the coworker feedback environment, it was found that feedback delivery and unfavorable feedback emerged as the most powerful predictors of accountability. Whereas Dorfman, et al. (1986) found that supervisor tact and sensitivity during feedback
exchange was related to employee motivation, the current study suggests that Dorfman, et al.’s results may extend to coworker tact during feedback delivery. It may be that feedback exchanges characterized by the willing and respectful delivery of performance information by coworkers influences the degree to which the feedback seeker feels obligated to act on obtained feedback. Conversely, feedback provided by coworkers in an inconsiderate or unsupportive manner may actively interfere with one’s sense of obligation to act on feedback for the purposes of improved performance.

Based on Walker and Smither’s (1999) findings that more frequent feedback was related to performance improvement, coworker unfavorable feedback was hypothesized to predict accountability. The results of this study indicate that greater frequency of unfavorable feedback may signal to employees the importance of utilizing feedback to modify work-related behavior, thereby influencing perceptions of accountability.

Overall, these results have important practical implications for organizations. Supervisors who provide high quality, consistent feedback and openly promote active feedback seeking influence accountability. Furthermore, coworkers who generally provide feedback in a considerate way and do not shy away from the provision of negative feedback when warranted also influence the degree to which one accepts and meets his/her personal responsibility regarding performance feedback.

These results should be particularly interesting to researchers who have cited a lack of accountability as the Achilles’ heel of many multisource and upward feedback programs (Walker & Smither, 1999). The current study suggests that implementing interventions aimed at increasing these aspects of the supervisor and coworker feedback environments may elevate levels of perceived accountability in general and ameliorate
some of the problems resulting from lack of accountability for performance management programs.

*Social Awareness.* In assessing the relationships between specific facets of the supervisor feedback environment and social awareness, analyses indicated that only supervisor feedback quality positively related to this dimension of feedback orientation. Similarly, for the coworker feedback environment, feedback quality emerged as the most powerful predictor of social awareness. Social awareness is defined as the tendency to use feedback to be aware of others’ views of oneself and to be sensitive to these views (Grefe, 2006). While no empirical research exists to guide the theoretical basis for this link, the relationship between perceptions of supervisor and coworker feedback quality and social awareness may arise out of a desire on the part of the feedback seeker to know how others within the social milieu view him/her. In other words, feedback characterized as helpful, useful, and valuable may clarify for the employee how supervisors and coworkers view him or her and whether impression management attempts are successful. On the other hand, feedback low in quality may not have the necessary informative content regarding an employee’s standing within an organization, lowering levels of social awareness.

Thus, these results suggest that organizations should ensure that both supervisors and coworkers are trained to delivery high quality feedback in a consistent manner. Importantly, this particular facet seems greatly influence the extent to which one becomes sensitive to others views in the feedback context.

*Feedback self-efficacy.* The model assessing which supervisor feedback environment facets best predict feedback self-efficacy demonstrated that supervisor
source credibility and unfavorable feedback emerged as the dominant predictors. Credible supervisors, those sources considered knowledgeable with respect to what constitutes an employee’s performance domain, may influence self-efficacy by providing feedback characterized by feedback seekers as challenging, yet not so challenging that the instructions embedded with the feedback are considered to difficult to carry out. Indeed, it seems likely that sources that provide feedback deemed impossible by seekers would themselves be considered non-credible sources. As a result, “credible” sources are most likely those that provide difficult, yet attainable, goals. The provision of such feedback from these sources may be seen as challenging, but because a credible supervisor knows the seeker’s past performance and what constitutes good performance in that job, the seeker may be more inclined to believe that the elicited feedback is achievable than if the feedback had come from a non-credible source whose feedback seems to demand the impossible.

Interestingly, both supervisor and coworker feedback unfavorability predicted feedback self-efficacy. Unfavorable feedback characterized as negative feedback given when performance falls below organizational standards may over time strengthen an employee’s ability to better handle feedback in general, and negative feedback specifically, ultimately elevating one’s perception about how self-assured he or she feels when given feedback. These results suggest that the provision of warranted negative feedback from both supervisors and coworkers may bolster an employee’s ability to deal with day-to-day feedback and feedback exchanges.

Lastly, coworker promotion of feedback seeking positively predicted feedback self-efficacy. While no literature could be found to serve as a theoretical foundation for
this relationship, it seems likely that employees who profess to work in an environment wherein feedback seeking is openly and actively encouraged and given feedback right away should feel more comfortable and less threatened when dealing with feedback and feedback exchanges.

The results of these analyses suggest that for organizations wishing to ensure that employees feel confident when dealing with feedback situations and addressing the content of the feedback itself, several suggestions could be made. First, supervisors should continually stay abreast of subordinate past performance and what constitutes good performance in his/her job. Second, coworkers who openly and actively encourage and provide feedback may make peers feel less threatened by the prospect of feedback and feedback exchanges. Lastly, both supervisors and coworkers may strengthen an employee’s ability to withstand negative feedback and thus make him/her more comfortable with the feedback process in general through the provision of negative feedback when appropriate.

*Predicting Feedback Orientation Facets Using Multidimensional Feedback Environments and their Facets.* Across all four of the feedback orientation facets and across source environments, use of the individual feedback environment facets accounted for more variance than did the composite supervisor or coworker feedback environment variables. Overall, results of these exploratory models are consistent with researchers who advocate that a multidimensional perspective be adopted when assessing criterion-related validity when dealing with multidimensional constructs (Ashton, 1998; Edwards, 2001).
By and large, the results of the facet-level ancillary and exploratory analyses suggest that a) feedback quality was the dominant predictor among all of the feedback environment facets, and b) in the interest of maximally predicting outcomes, researchers and practitioners are better off adopting a multidimensional perspective when manipulating and measuring the feedback environment. However, in many instances, the incremental prediction was rather small. The results are further discussed in the Implications and Future Research section.

Implications and Future Research

The results of this study underscore the importance of the feedback environment in everyday organizational life. Supportive feedback sources (both supervisors and coworkers) can craft contexts that stimulate, enable, and sustain effective self-regulation through feedback seeking by influencing the development of employee feedback orientation.

Whereas very little research has been conducted with an eye towards training organizational actors to provide better feedback, the results presented in this study suggest that an individual’s feedback orientation may be directly influenced by interventions initiated to change the feedback environment. In order to maximally impact feedback seeking, researchers and practitioners may find it useful to employ the Feedback Environment and Feedback Orientation scales in tandem. Both scales were constructed as diagnostic tools; the Feedback Environment Scale diagnoses feedback processes in organizations and may be used to educate managers and peers in ways to give more meaningful feedback (Steelman et al, 2004), whereas the Feedback Orientation
scale is meant to provide valuable insight into the degree to which an employee is open or receptive to feedback (Grefe, 2006).

Using these scales in conjunction with one another, an organization would be provided with direction for shaping a context that helps individuals build and use the self-regulation tactics that contribute to personal effectiveness and organizational success, the ability to monitor the effects of changes in the feedback environment on feedback orientation at an aggregate level, and a method by which to identify those in need of further coaching for feedback orientation development at the individual level. Furthermore, feedback researchers have called for studies empirically linking the feedback environment, feedback orientation, employee behavior, goals, and perceptions to understand the broader performance management cycle (Levy & Williams, 2004; London, 2003; London & Smither, 2002).

Because feedback is an integral component of performance management processes in general, studies employing these measures may illuminate our understanding of how employees choose to seek feedback, how it is perceived, and the extent to which feedback is accepted and used. In the end, this line of research would serve to inform practice by gaining a better understanding of how these elements interact to influence performance appraisal acceptance, performance goals that are adopted, and ultimately behavioral change.

The general implication of this study suggests that organizations should focus on developing positive supervisor and coworker feedback-seeking environments in order to promote the development of employee feedback orientation as this ultimately influences active feedback-seeking behavior, role clarity, and job performance. Indeed, our results
suggest that a non-supportive environment may actively hamper the feedback orientation of those with a performance-prove goal orientation. As such, creating an environment conducive to feedback seeking should foster the development of feedback orientation for these employees. According to the results of the current study, however, there will be some employees whose feedback orientation will be unaffected even by a strong, supportive feedback environment (specifically, those with a performance-avoid orientation).

Importantly, recent research indicates that organizations may be able to help facilitate the emergence of employee learning and performance-prove goal orientation while minimizing that of performance-avoid goal orientation (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). In accordance with a host of researchers, the current study assumed that the goal orientation constructs are stable personality traits (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; Button, et al., 1996; Colquitt & Simmering, 1998), however, achievement motivation theory also recognizes that goal orientation can be activated by a variety of situational factors. Research has now demonstrated that learning and performance goal orientations may be induced by deliberate manipulation (Ames, 1992; Kozlowski, Gully, Brown, Salas, Smith, & Nason, 2001; Martocchio, 1994; Winters & Latham, 1996). The results of these studies suggest that goal orientation is a malleable construct that employees may be trained on to influence feedback orientation and affect self-regulation.

Furthermore, future research should assess the interaction between the differing goal orientations and individual facets of the feedback environment on feedback-related outcomes of interest. Madzar (2001) results suggest that supervisors who are seen as highly credible and available feedback sources may bolster employees’ desire to garner
performance-related information, particularly for those employees preferentially interested in positive performance outcomes. These results suggest that source credibility or source availability may interact with learning goal orientation or performance-prove orientation to influence feedback seeking. More research is needed at the facet level to discern the differentiated interactive effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation.

On the theoretical side, studies along these lines would contribute to the budding literature focusing on positive psychology. This line of research is concerned with examining and identifying the ways in which people’s innate strengths and psychological capabilities are maximized (e.g., Cameron et al., 2003). In order to minimize or potentially eliminate the attenuating effects of performance-avoid orientation on the feedback environment/feedback orientation relationship, researchers can identify the most effective ways to enhance self-regulation strategies by uncovering the best ways to help people recognize their own behavioral patterns and help them alter the way think and behave to attain desired goals (Mischel & Mendoza-Denton, 2003).

The research literature is also enhanced by this study’s exploratory analyses investigating whether supervisor or coworker feedback environment facets better predict feedback orientation facets than do composite supervisor and coworker feedback environment variables. In accordance with those that argue that multidimensional constructs often have lower criterion-related validity than some of their subdimensions (Aston, 1998), the results of this study demonstrate that specific components of supervisor and coworker feedback environments may sometimes explain more variance
in a given feedback orientation dimension than the global supervisor and coworker feedback environment variables.

One specific component of the feedback environment, feedback quality, consistently emerged as a powerful predictor of feedback orientation facets. Feedback quality has long been recognized as a critically important feedback characteristic (Greller, 1980; Hanser & Muchinsky, 1978; Herold, et al., 1987, Steelman et al., 2004). Feedback considered high in quality is specific and consistent across time. Low quality feedback, on the other hand, may vary according to source’s mood, affect, or opportunity for observation (London, 1997). Indeed, according to Ilgen et al. (1979), perceived informational value is an important factor in whether the feedback seeker accepts and is willing to respond to the feedback. More specifically, the results of the current study indicate that feedback quality, over and above all other feedback environment dimensions and the global feedback environment itself, preferentially influences the degree to which one views feedback as an important contributor to workplace success, feels responsible for applying feedback for the sake of improved performance, and attempts to be aware of others opinions.

According to Ilgen et al (1979), quality feedback is readily interpretable to feedback recipients and leads to incremental increases in knowledge regarding roles and the appropriateness of performance. In this sense, quality feedback performs a directional function for employees by indicating those behaviors that should be used to regulate or improve future performance. However, as noted by feedback theorists (Ilgen et al., 1979; Nadler, 1979), quality feedback also provides a motivational function by clarifying the links between behavior and outcomes associated with work behavior. Following these
assertions, motivational theorists began to understand the importance of quality feedback and subsequently incorporated feedback into theoretical models of motivation and performance. For example, the goal setting literature mandates that quality feedback regarding performance and goal progress is required in order to guide behavior and gauge whether one’s efforts are aligned with goal attainment (Latham & Yukl, 1975; Locke & Latham, 2002). Indeed, the results of the current study demonstrate that high-quality feedback is instrumental for the development of several aspects of employee feedback orientation, which is itself described as one’s motivation to accept, seek, and use feedback (Grefe, 2006).

Overall, it seems that consistent, descriptive, specific feedback plays an obvious role in the establishment and maintenance of beliefs about behavior-outcome contingencies as well as the motivation to better understand job requirements. The importance of feedback quality becomes increasingly salient as jobs become more complex and employees are required to be more autonomous (London & Smither, 2002). For example, employees are increasingly asked to work independently (e.g., telecommuters), far away from their home organization (e.g., expatriates), or within an increasingly diverse and multicultural workforce (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Rau & Hyland, 2002; van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Thus, more and more workers cannot as easily anticipate others’ feedback, do not know how others view their performance, and are generally not given feedback unless they seek that feedback directly. The results of this study suggest that employees are more motivated to seek out and use feedback if they know that the feedback provided will be highly informative and provide specific information regarding their normative standing and
means by which to improve individual performance. Given that the subdimensions of employee feedback orientation are shown in this study to be dramatically influenced by perceptions of feedback quality, it may be in the organization’s best interest to ensure that those in a position to provide feedback are trained in techniques by which to deliver high quality, consistent feedback.

The findings of this study also indicate that role clarity partially mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance. Effective self-regulation of work-related behavior requires the alignment of personal goals and performance to organizational standards and expectations (Vancouver, 2000). Role expectations are in a constant state of flux and are often implicit (Sawyer, 1992; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoades, 1996); thus, in order to achieve this alignment, employees need to continually engage in feedback seeking and self-regulation in order to evaluate and adjust their behaviors accordingly (Ashford, 1986; Bauer & Simmon, 2000). Active feedback seeking yields information directly relevant to employee concerns regarding work processes and goals, organizational expectations, and performance appraisal, which directly influences role clarity and by extension, job performance. Here again, feedback quality is of critical importance. As noted by several feedback theorists, feedback seeking should relate to role clarity to the extent that the feedback itself is consistent, detailed, and accurate (Ashford et al., 2003; Ilgen et al., 1979). As it is unlikely that all feedback is beneficial for the sake of clarifying expectations, future research should identify and examine characteristics of the feedback received that either augment or attenuate the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity. As noted by Ashford et al. (2003), much of the impact of feedback depends on the nature of the messages obtained.
Limitations

Despite this study’s contributions, some important limitations of this study should be noted. First, this study relied on employed undergraduate students with modest job tenure. The mean tenure for subordinates was just under 2 years; as such, generalizability of these results may be somewhat bounded. The issue of tenure may be particularly relevant when considering that feedback orientation is thought to remain stable over shorter terms (6 to 12 months) and is shaped gradually over time by situational factors (London & Smither, 2002). Thus, the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation should strengthen the longer the individual is employed within that feedback environment. If long-term experience with a particular feedback environment is more likely to influence feedback orientation than short-term experience, data gathered on a sample with relatively little tenure may produce inaccurate estimates of the relationship between the feedback environment and feedback orientation. As such, it is important that future studies employ samples that better represent employees with more tenure.

In a related vein, a second limitation of this study is that hypothesis testing was conducted in a cross-sectional manner, which limits the extent that causality can be assessed. Longitudinal research examining how the feedback environment and personality characteristics influence the development of employee feedback orientation is another area for additional research. The impact of these variables on the shaping of feedback orientation is most likely too complicated to adequately capture using a cross-sectional design. Furthermore, empirical research assessing individuals’ perceptions of the feedback environment as they change jobs, supervisors, or companies, and their
attendant effects on feedback orientation may be insightful for understanding how individuals’ feedback orientations can develop and change over time and situations. Similarly, longitudinal research examining the ongoing relationship between feedback seeking, role clarity, and job performance would be helpful.

**Conclusion**

The burgeoning literature on the feedback environment has begun to link this important construct to many relevant employee behaviors and attitudes (Anseel & Lievens, 2006; Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006; Steelman & Levy, 2001; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, in press). However, the underlying mechanisms linking the feedback environment to feedback seeking, and those linking feedback seeking to job performance, are not well understood. To address these gaps in the literature, this study integrated current theoretical and empirical research to develop and test a model explicating these links. Data obtained from 202 supervisor-subordinate dyads indicated that goal orientation and feedback orientation play important roles in linking the feedback environment to feedback seeking, and that role clarity is an important mediator of the feedback seeking/job performance link.

The results of the current study carry with them important implications for both researchers and practitioners. First, results indicate that developing supportive feedback environments influences employee feedback orientation, which in turn influences feedback seeking behavior; however, the link between the feedback environment and feedback orientation is moderated by goal orientation. Research findings demonstrating that goal orientation is inducible (Ames, 1992; Kozlowski, Gully, Brown, Salas, Smith, & Nason, 2001; Martocchio, 1994; Winters & Latham, 1996) suggest that the detrimental
effects of performance-avoid goal orientation on this link may be overcome through training; future research should examine the effects of priming goal orientation on feedback-related processes. Second, the findings of the present study suggest that supervisor feedback high in quality dramatically influences certain feedback orientation facets (utility, accountability, and social awareness) and that high quality coworker feedback also influences feedback orientation facets (utility and social awareness). Thus, organizations wishing to elevate levels of utility, accountability, and social awareness should first focus on ensuring that the feedback exchanges are characterized by consistent, useful, and detailed feedback. Perhaps training organizational actors to provide recipients with feedback with these characteristics may be an initial step in this direction. Lastly, feedback seeking was found to influence job performance by clarifying role expectations and organizational standards. Training feedback sources to provide feedback high in quality may effectively curb misdirected or insufficient effort on the part of those lacking a clear understanding of role expectations. Overall and in general, although the current study provides support for the model linking the organization’s feedback environment, individual’s feedback-seeking behavior, and job performance, additional research is needed to advance understanding of how the feedback environment positively influences outcomes for both individuals as well as the organization.
CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY

Recently, the definition of the feedback environment has been expanded; the more contemporary operationalization encompasses the broad social milieu in which day-to-day feedback exchanges occur (Steelman, et al., 2004). Using this updated conceptualization, researchers have demonstrated empirical links between feedback environment and important employee behaviors and attitudes (Anseel & Lievens, 2006; Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Rosen, et al., 2006; Steelman & Levy, 2001; Steelman et al., 2004; Whitaker, et al., in press). In addition, feedback researchers (Ashford, et al., 2003; Herold & Fedor, 1998; London & Smither, 2002; Morrison, 2002) have called for research investigating the intervening mechanisms by which the organization’s feedback environment influences feedback-seeking behavior, as well as those involved in the relationship between feedback seeking and job performance. As such, the primary purpose of the current study was to address these issues by developing a model that more clearly delineates these mechanisms.

Contemporary feedback researchers have adopted theoretical perspectives in which broad personal characteristics interact with the work environment to influence a more narrow, domain-specific trait (i.e., feedback orientation), which in turn, is thought to affect the extent to which individuals engage in the feedback process and feedback seeking (Herold & Fedor, 1998; London & Smither, 2002). However, to date empirical
studies have not examined whether individual difference variables moderate the effects of the feedback environment. Thus, the present study sought to examine the interactive effects of the feedback environment and goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) on Grefe’s (2006) newly-validated measure of feedback orientation, a feedback-specific individual difference variable. In the present study, the organization’s feedback environment was thought to interact with trait goal orientation to influence feedback orientation, in turn influencing the extent to which one engages in feedback seeking behavior. In addition, this study sought to address the inconsistencies in the literature regarding the feedback seeking/job performance link (Ang, et al., 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993) by heeding researchers calls to investigate potential mediating and moderating variables of this relationship (Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison, 2002; VandeWalle, 2003). Specifically, the current study assessed the mediating influence of role clarity on this link and the moderating effects of social skill on the feedback seeking/role clarity relationship. While the primary focus of this study was on the model linking the feedback environment to feedback seeking to impact job performance, this study had a secondary purpose; to more closely investigate the link between the multidimensional constructs of the feedback environment and feedback orientation.

To test the model outlined above, employed students from undergraduate psychology classes were recruited, asked to complete an online survey measuring the focal variables under study, and provide their immediate supervisors with an additional questionnaire. Data on a total of 202 supervisor-subordinate dyads were obtained and analyzed using structural equation modeling and moderated multiple regression.
Following modifications to one scale in the modeled (some cross-loading items for the feedback orientation scale were dropped), path coefficients were tested. Once a direct path from feedback seeking to job performance was allowed, the path model demonstrated good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). With the exception of the direct link between feedback seeking and job performance, the results support the proposed model. Perceptions of a supportive feedback environment influence employee feedback orientation, which in turn, positively influence feedback seeking behavior. Furthermore, while feedback seeking directly influenced job performance, role clarity partially mediated this relationship.

Moderator analyses indicated that learning goal orientation and performance-avoid goal orientation moderated the feedback environment/feedback orientation link. Specifically, this relationship was weaker for those higher in learning goal orientation and those higher in performance-avoid goal orientation. These findings suggest that employees higher in learning goal orientation are feedback-oriented despite a non-supportive feedback environment; conversely, those higher in performance-avoid goal orientation do not become feedback-oriented despite a highly supportive feedback environment. Performance-prove goal orientation had no moderating effects on this link, nor did social interact with feedback seeking to influence role clarity.

Results of the facet-level analyses are consistent with researchers who advocate that a multidimensional perspective be adopted when assessing criterion-related validity when dealing with multidimensional constructs (Ashton, 1998; Edwards, 2001). The results of the current study demonstrated that supervisor feedback quality accounted for more variance in utility, accountability, and social awareness than any other feedback.
environment subdimension, whereas coworker feedback quality accounted for more variance in utility and social awareness. Interestingly, the composite supervisor and coworker feedback environment variables never accounted for more variance in the feedback orientation facets than did the individual supervisor and coworker facets as a group.

Overall, the results presented serve to increase our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that link the feedback environment to feedback seeking behavior, and those linking feedback seeking to job performance. From a practical perspective, decision-makers in organizations may use the results of this study to guide the development of interventions aimed at increasing feedback seeking by altering the work context and employee feedback orientation. Developing climates wherein feedback seeking is openly encouraged, where high-quality feedback is made available by supervisors and coworkers alike may foster the development of employee feedback orientation to ultimately elevate levels of employee feedback seeking behavior and job performance. Furthermore, these results suggest that organizations wishing to influence specific aspects of employee feedback orientation may intervene by employing specific dimensions of the feedback environment. Lastly, future research should investigate the effects of inducing goal orientation on the feedback environment/feedback orientation link as well as the effects of feedback characteristics (e.g., feedback quality) on the relationship between feedback seeking and role clarity.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

THE FEEDBACK ENVIRONMENT SCALE (STEELMAN ET AL., 2004) – ABBREVIATED VERSION

Supervisor Source Credibility
1. My supervisor is generally familiar with my performance on the job.
2. My supervisor is fair when evaluating my job performance.
3. I have confidence in the feedback my supervisor gives me.

Supervisor Feedback Quality
1. My supervisor gives me useful feedback about my job performance.
2. The performance feedback I receive from my supervisor is helpful.
3. I value the feedback I receive from my supervisor.

Supervisor Feedback Delivery
1. My supervisor is supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance.
2. When my supervisor gives me performance feedback, he or she is considerate of my feelings.
3. My supervisor is tactful when giving me performance feedback.

Supervisor Favorable Feedback
1. When I do a good job at work my supervisor praises my performance.
2. My supervisor generally lets me know when I do a good job at work.
3. I frequently receive positive feedback from my supervisor.

Supervisor Unfavorable Feedback
1. My supervisor tells me when my work performance does not meet organizational standards.
2. On those occasions when my job performance falls below what is expected, my supervisor lets me know.
3. On those occasions when I make a mistake at work, my supervisor tells me.

Supervisor Feedback Availability

1. My supervisor is usually available when I want performance information.
2. My supervisor is too busy to give me feedback.
3. I interact with my supervisor on a daily basis.

Supervisor Promotes Feedback Seeking

1. My supervisor is often annoyed when I directly ask for performance feedback.
2. When I ask for performance feedback, my supervisor generally does not give me the information right away.
3. My supervisor encourages me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance.

Co-worker Source Credibility

1. My co-workers are generally familiar with my performance on the job.
2. My co-workers are fair when evaluating my job performance.
3. I have confidence in the feedback my co-workers give me.

Co-Worker Feedback Quality

1. My co-workers give me useful feedback about my job performance.
2. The performance feedback I receive from my co-workers is helpful.
3. I value the feedback I receive from my co-workers.

Co-Worker Feedback Delivery

1. My co-workers are supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance.
2. When my co-workers give me performance feedback, they are usually considerate of my feelings.
3. In general, my co-workers are tactful when giving me performance feedback.

Co-Worker Favorable Feedback

1. When I do a good job at work my co-workers praise my performance.
2. My co-workers generally let me know when I do a good job at work.
3. I frequently receive positive feedback from my co-workers.

Co-Worker Unfavorable Feedback
1. My co-workers tell me when my job performance does not meet organizational standards.
2. On those occasions when my job performance falls below what is expected, my co-workers let me know.
3. On those occasions when I make a mistake at work, my co-workers tell me.

Co-Worker Feedback Availability

1. My co-workers are usually available when I want performance information.
2. My co-workers are too busy to give me feedback.
3. I have little contact with my co-workers.

Co-Worker Promotes Feedback Seeking

1. My co-workers are often annoyed when I directly ask them for performance feedback.
2. I feel comfortable asking my co-workers for feedback about my work performance.
3. My co-workers encourage me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance.
APPENDIX B

FEEDBACK ORIENTATION (GREFE, 2006)

Utility

1. Feedback contributes to my success at work.
2. To develop my skills at work, I rely on feedback.
3. Feedback is critical for improving performance.
4. Feedback from supervisors can help me advance in a company.
5. I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals.

Accountability

1. It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance.
2. I hold myself accountable to respond to feedback appropriately.
3. I don’t feel a sense of closure until I respond to feedback.
4. If my supervisor gives me feedback, it is my responsibility to respond to it.
5. I feel obligated to make changes based on feedback.

Social Awareness

1. I try to be aware of what other people think of me.
2. Using feedback, I am more aware of what people think of me.
3. Feedback helps me manage the impression I make on others.
4. Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others.
5. I rely on feedback to help me make a good impression.

Feedback Self-Efficacy

1. I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback.
2. Compared to others, I am more competent at handling feedback.
3. I believe that I have the ability to deal with feedback effectively.
4. I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback.
5. I know that I can handle the feedback that I receive.
APPENDIX C

GOAL ORIENTATION (VANDEWALLE, 1997)

Learning Goal Orientation
1. I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from.
2. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.
3. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I’ll learn new skills.
4. For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks.
5. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent.

Performance-Prove Orientation
1. I’m concerned with showing that I can perform better than my coworkers.
2. I try to figure out what it takes to prove my ability to others at work.
3. I enjoy it when others at work are aware of how well I am doing.
4. I prefer to work on projects where I can prove my ability to others.

Performance-Avoid Orientation
1. I would avoid taking on a new task if there was a chance that I would appear rather incompetent to others.
2. Avoiding a show of low ability is more important to me that learning a new skill.
3. I’m concerned about taking on a task at work if my performance would reveal that I had low ability.
4. I prefer to avoid situations at work where I might perform poorly.
APPENDIX D

FEEDBACK SEEKING BEHAVIOR

*Williams & Johnson (2000) items* - rating scale ranges from 1 (Never) to 6 (Always)

1. How often do you ask your supervisor for information about what is required of you to function successfully on the job?
2. How often do you ask your co-workers for information about what is required of you to function successfully on the job?
3. How often do you ask your supervisor how well you are performing on the job?
4. How often do you ask your co-workers how well you are performing on the job?

*Normative items* - rating scale ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

Compared to the people that I work with, I often…

1. …seek clarification when I’m unclear about some aspect of my work.
2. …ask for information regarding how to perform specific functions.
3. …ask for an informal appraisal of how well I am doing on the job.
4. …ask about which behaviors will help me do my job better.

*Strategic items* - rating scale ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

1. If my supervisor is swamped, I don’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient.
2. If my coworkers are swamped, I don’t bother with asking for feedback until it’s more convenient.
3. I’m careful to seek feedback only when it seems appropriate.
4. If I have a question about my performance or duties at work, I ask for feedback then and there without hesitation (R).
APPENDIX E

ROLE CLARITY (SAWYER, 1992)

Instructions: Please indicate how certain or clear you are about each aspect of your work.

Goal Clarity
1. My duties and responsibilities.
2. The goals and objectives for my job.
3. How my work relates to the overall objectives of my work unit.
4. The expected results of my work.
5. What aspects of my work will lead to positive evaluations.

Process Clarity
1. How to divide my time among the tasks required of my job.
2. How to schedule my work day.
3. How to determine the appropriate procedures for each work task.
4. The procedures I use to do my job are correct and proper.
5. Considering all your work tasks, how certain are you that you know the best ways to do these tasks?
APPENDIX F

SOCIAL SKILL (FERRIS ET AL., 2001)

1. I find it easy to put myself in the position of others.
2. I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others.
3. In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do.
4. I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.
5. I am good at making myself visible with influential people in my organization.
6. I am good at reading others’ body language.
7. I am able to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation.
APPENDIX G

JOB PERFORMANCE (WILLIAMS & ANDERSON, 1991)

Task Performance
1. Adequately completes assigned duties.
2. Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.
3. Performs tasks that are expected of him/her.
5. Engages in activities that will directly affect his/her performance evaluation.
6. Neglect aspects of the job that he/she is obligated to perform. (R)
7. Fails to perform essential duties. (R)

OCBIs
8. Helps others who have been absent.
9. Helps others who have heavy work loads.
10. Assists supervisor with his/her workload (when not asked)
11. Takes time to listen to co-workers’ problems and worries.
12. Goes out of his/her way to help new employees.
13. Takes a personal interest in other employees.
14. Passes along information to co-workers.

OCBOs
15. Attendance at work is above the norm.
16. Gives advance notice when unable to come to work.
17. Takes undeserved work breaks.
18. Spends a great deal of time with personal phone conversations.
19. Complains about insignificant things at work.
20. Conserves and protects organizational property.
21. Adheres to informal rules devised to maintain order.