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<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>
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List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correlational Matrix for Key Study Variables</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effect of Tenure on Pay Satisfaction</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Measures</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. IRB Approval Letter</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Informed Consent Form</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Research has found that key components to behavioral feedback are relevancy, timeliness and specificity typically associated with informal performance feedback. This study examined whether informal performance feedback was related to job satisfaction. Participants from an online survey collection website were asked to complete a survey. Perceived organizational support, leader-member exchange, goal orientation, and self-efficacy were also examined in this study to determine their relationship to informal feedback and job satisfaction. Results indicated that informal feedback did have a significant effect on job satisfaction though goal orientation did not moderate the informal feedback and self-efficacy relationship. This study demonstrated that high levels of informal performance feedback can improve employee perceptions of overall job satisfaction and should be taken into consideration when performance feedback is provided.
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Feedback involves the communication of information that expresses how others perceive and evaluate an individual's behavior (Ashford, 1986). This information about behavioral performance can also come from the individual through interpretation of thoughts and emotions. Feedback impresses upon the recipient information to better understand external perceptions of behavior. The actor of the behavior is provided answers to various questions such as if the message was conveyed properly, if the effort was worthwhile, and the results of one's actions. Without performance feedback, actors can be left with a sense of uncertainty and can feel without direction as how to perform in the future.

Cohen and Wills (1985) characterize performance feedback as one of the more instructionally powerful and least understood features in instructional design. Performance feedback is an integral part of an employee's ability to remain productive and focused on job-related tasks and goals. Feedback from managers, coworkers, and clients among others can relay information to employees and help them self-regulate and reduce performance and behavioral discrepancies. Behavioral feedback in the work setting has been found to be central to employee training, job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction (Greller & Herold, 1975).

Annett (1969) thought of feedback as information about current or past behavior that is received by an individual. How an individual interprets the feedback can be
affected by the credibility and power of the feedback’s source, the message the feedback conveys, and the feedback’s recipient (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Feedback sources who are perceived to be highly knowledgeable about both the familiarity of the task and the individual’s performance on the task, are perceived to be trustworthy, and have some control over behavioral reinforcers will be considered credible and powerful enough to garner the individual’s consideration. The message the feedback conveys will only be considered useful if it is new, specific information that is easily transferred to actionable steps. The recipient of the feedback is the last key component in how an individual will interpret feedback. Characteristics such as goal orientation and self-efficacy may regulate how open and willing the individual is to new performance information. These three aspects of feedback are then believed to affect how the individual perceives, accepts, desires to respond, and intends to respond to the information (Ilgen et al., 1979). All of these effects of feedback need to be taken into consideration when constructing systems and processes to manage performance in organizations.

Performance feedback can be differentiated into two kinds: formal and informal. Formal feedback can be thought of as traditional, structured annual or semi-annual performance appraisals. An employee’s performance is typically evaluated by a source who has had periodic interactions with the employee, and an overall conclusion is made as to whether the employee performed at a level above expectation, at expectation, or below expectation. This appraisal can then be used for purposes such as training, development, promotion, pay raise, or termination.

In contrast, informal feedback is defined as regular, day-to-day feedback that employees receive from their managers, coworkers and clients with the goal of managing
performance (Farr, 1993). Informal feedback can also be conceptualized as a non-organizationally driven method (i.e., non Documented, or pre-arranged communication) employees can use to reduce uncertainty when self-evaluating their performance.

Examples of this are a brief comment by a client to an employee during passing, a boss saying “good job” after an employee gives a presentation, and a conversation between employees during lunch about a manager’s project expectations.

In terms of uses, feedback research has primarily focused on employee training (Hazucha, Hezlett, & Schneider, 1993), job performance (Erickson & Allen, 2003), perceptions of politics (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006), and motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999), but few studies have focused on the potential relationship between performance feedback and job satisfaction, particularly informal feedback. Hence the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between informal performance feedback and job satisfaction. This study broadens the research on the nature of informal feedback and its function in employee’s satisfaction with their perceptions of behavior ambiguity. First, the paper will discuss performance feedback and job satisfaction’s relationship to behavioral ambiguity. Then, hypotheses will be introduced to further explore the feedback-job satisfaction relationship.

Performance Management

Feedback needs to be perceived by the recipient as accurate and precise in order to increase the possibility of behavior change (Ilgen et al., 1979). Once behaviors are identified as satisfactory or unsatisfactory the appraisal then needs to be communicated to the employee. In most organizations, employee feedback is incorporated under the umbrella of performance management. Performance management “done effectively...
communicates what’s important to the organization, drives employees to achieve results, and implements the organization’s strategy. Done poorly... [it] not only fails to achieve these benefits but can also undermine employee confidence and damage relationships” (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011, p. 147). Properly utilizing performance management systems depends on employee relationships with their managers, and the manager’s ability to successfully communicate information to aid in positive employee behavior change.

Performance management feedback typically occurs in annual, structured, formal administrative systems that are disconnected from day-to-day activities (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). This disjointed process fails to provide feedback-seeking employees with one of the three criteria for effective feedback, which, according to Kreitner (1977), are positive, timely, and specific. Although annual performance appraisals can provide positive and specific feedback regardless of how or when an employee may have demonstrated a behavior, obtaining feedback information that is disconnected from daily activities is not timely, because the feedback must occur in close temporal proximity to the behavior. This disconnect between when a behavior occurs and when performance feedback is provided results in feedback that can be less relevant to the employees’ current work situation. Also, the longer a manager waits to provide employees with information about performance the more likely various biases and retrieval induced errors will dilute the feedback (Storm, Bjork, & Bjork, 2004). Information that is perceived to be vague or irrelevant to current performance will fail to reduce any behavioral discrepancies. The inability for employees to receive relevant information at the right time from managers can cause employees to produce less than maximal performance (Cummings, Schwab, & Rosen, 1971), and be less engaged in their job (Xu & Thomas,
2011). It is therefore imperative that managers provide subordinates with feedback at appropriate times if they are to minimize an employee’s uncertainty and reinforce desirable behavior.

Performance management systems play an important role in the effectiveness of uncertainty reduction and behavior reinforcement because it aids in an employee’s self-regulation process through goal setting. When employees set goals and directions by which they will conduct their behavior, they are setting standards. Ashford (1986) argued that employees seek informational feedback to determine “the correctness and adequacy of behaviors for attaining valued end states” (p. 465). By collecting informational feedback, employees will detect a discrepancy when these standards are not met or are not perceived to be effective. The corresponding actions taken by an employee to alleviate or reduce a discrepancy is the basis for behavior change and learning. The act of seeking or receiving feedback will reduce any perceived uncertainty in an employee’s behavior and help them acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary for successful performance. One way employees can acquire the KSAs to be a successful performer is through self-regulation.

**Self-Regulation/Control Theory.** The process of setting standards, detecting behavioral discrepancies, and working towards reducing those discrepancies is called self-regulation (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Ashford and Cummings (1983) suggest individuals can either gain performance feedback through indirectly monitoring their environment for social cues or directly inquiring how others perceive their behavior. In formal performance management settings, self-regulation occurs during periodic performance reviews. Employees are appraised by various feedback sources and
presented with information that will either coincide or conflict with current behavioral beliefs. The longer the time lapse between the initial behavior and an appraisal of that behavior, the less opportunity the employee will have to reduce or eliminate unintended discrepancies. In contrast, informal feedback does not rely on specific appraisal events to trigger the exchange of behavioral information so discrepancies can be addressed in closer temporal proximity to the initial behavior.

Interestingly, uncertainty concerning behavior discrepancies has been found to be positively associated with feedback-seeking behavior (Crawford, 1974), stress (Ashford, 1988) and negatively associated with job satisfaction (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989), commitment (Hui & Lee, 2000), and trust in the organization (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Events that are novel, unexpected, and uncertain benefit from information communication (Suchman & Wynn, 1984). Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1980) report that information communicated in a descriptive, specific, interactive, well-timed, and clear way outlines the basic characteristics of effective feedback. When the discrepancy between desired and real performance is reduced or eliminated, an employee will no longer recognize any behavioral uncertainty, and they will be satisfied with their performance. It is therefore necessary for employers to have a performance management system to help inform employees of differences in their present performance and their desired performance in order to reach their goals.

Sadler (1989) found that in order for feedback to be beneficial, it should provide information concerning the standard of good performance, to what it is being compared, and how to reduce any discrepancy between enacted and espoused performance. Employees can receive performance feedback from the organization, supervisor, co-
workers, the task, and "one's own self" (Greller & Herold, 1975). Feedback from outside resources has the ability to expedite discrepancy acknowledgement and redirect behavior towards actualizing more favorable performance (Smith & Kight, 1959) and reducing uncertainty (Ashford, 1986). Yet, how employees respond to performance feedback is determined in part by their goal orientation and level of self-efficacy.

**Goal orientation.** The type of feedback that employees respond to is based on the form of knowledge acquisition and type of goal orientation they possess. Dweck and Leggett's (1988) implicit theory of ability states that there are two forms of knowledge acquisition, entity and incremental. Individuals with an entity orientation believe that knowledge is a fixed and uncontrollable personality characteristic. Individuals with an incremental orientation view knowledge acquisition as a process that can be expanded through learning and experience.

As cited in Bempechat and London (1991), Bandura and Dweck's (1985) research on goal theory has found that an individual's perspective on ability affects the type of goal orientation they endorse. Dweck and Leggett (1988) further elaborated on this research and found that people tend to have either a learning orientation or a performance orientation. An employee who has a learning goal orientation will be more inclined to view knowledge as incrementally learned, and will be more responsive to feedback that will help them understand something novel or to develop competence in a given activity. A person who holds this goal orientation will also perceive positive feedback as reinforcement that they are acquiring knowledge about a certain concept, and negative feedback as an opportunity to correct mistakes and develop additional capabilities (VandeWalle, 2001). In contrast, individuals who adopt a performance goal orientation
will be more disposed to believe KSAs are fixed, and will respond more to feedback that validates their competencies and promotes their self-esteem. Those individuals will also perceive positive feedback as a reflection of their competence with an activity, and negative feedback as a sign of incompetence that will challenge their self-efficacy (VandeWalle, 2001).

Goal orientation has since been expanded from a one-factor model to a two-factor model (e.g. Heyman & Deweck, 1992). This new model incorporates the belief that individuals can hold both orientations, and thus goal orientation should be perceived as a continuum spanning from learning oriented to performance oriented. Other researchers have expanded this model even further by breaking down learning goal orientation into learning-approach and learning-avoid (e.g. Elliot & McGregor, 2001), and performance goal orientation into performance-approach and performance-avoid (e.g. Elliot & Church, 1997, DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). The learning or mastery dimension has been broken down into approach-avoid with learning-approach defined as the desire to master a novel subject, and learning-avoid as striving to not demonstrate an inability to learn. The performance dimension has, in turn, been broken down into approach-avoid to signify that individuals may perform out of a desire to prove competence (approach) or avoid demonstrating incompetence (avoid). Consequently, performance management providers need to take into account which type of goal orientation an employee prefers if the rater is going to provide beneficial behavioral feedback without inducing feelings of incompetence. For purposes of this study, goal orientation will be measured in the two-factor framework with learning and performance as the two overall components. The
two-factor framework is the simplest way to measure the construct of goal orientation while still measuring the distinction between the learning and performance orientations.

**Self-efficacy.** An individual’s level of self-efficacy also influences their ability to use feedback to self-regulate their behavior (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Wood and Bandura (1989) described self-efficacy as a “belief in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (p. 408). Self-efficacy can be viewed as a general self-judgment about task competence (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Gist and Mitchell (1992) found that self-efficacy has been shown to influence the interpretation of feedback, and positively correlate with task persistence (Cervone & Peake, 1986) and task performance (Gist, 1989). In the work setting, if an employee positively interprets behavioral feedback on a task, their self-efficacy will increase and they will be more motivated to direct their energy towards the task. Self-efficacy is important in the context of feedback because information stemming from feedback will increase or decrease an employee’s expectations that their effort will correspond with goal attainment. Feedback will also decrease perceived ambiguity and increase the probability that continued effort will result in goal attainment (House, 1971).

Self-efficacy will also impact individuals with different goal orientations. As stated previously, a performance oriented individual will only demonstrate effort if it will produce continued reassurance in his/her competence (Janssen & Prins, 2007). For performance goal oriented individuals, positive feedback will increase their self-confidence and reinforce their perception that they are competent in the given situation (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). The opposite holds true for negative feedback. Negative feedback will decrease a performance oriented individual's confidence in their ability to
perform in that given situation in the future (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). In contrast, learning goal oriented individuals will perceive both positive and negative feedback as beneficial to their self-efficacy. Positive feedback will reassure learning oriented individuals that they are performing adequately and negative feedback will cause a readjustment of strategies (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Employees with a learning goal orientation will have a strong belief that their efforts will produce a favorable outcome and will continue their efforts despite any possible setbacks.

Sherer, Maddox, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, and Rogers (1982) delineated self-efficacy into two parts: general and social. General self-efficacy reflects a person’s efficacy expectations without reference to any specific behavioral setting, and social self-efficacy specifically reflect a person’s expectations in social situations. For this study, only general self-efficacy will be measured. It was not deemed necessary to measure someone’s self-efficacy as it relates to social situations as well. The main focus of this paper is to expand on our understanding of how self-efficacy relates to performing behaviors at work, not social situations. Questions such as, “I do not handle myself well in social gatherings,” measure a variable beyond the scope of this paper.

**Influences of culture.** The type of organizational culture that employees work in will also have an effect on how employees react to feedback and the extent they feel encouraged to act on it. Denison (1984) defines corporate culture as “the set of values, beliefs, and behavior patterns that form the core identity of an organization” (p. 5). He expands on this definition by defining a strong culture as one that “encourages the participation and involvement of an organization’s members” (p. 5).
One type of organizational culture that may be beneficial in terms of feedback acceptance is a culture that promotes social exchange. Social exchange involves the participation of two individuals in a mutually rewarding process (Emerson, 1976). Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000) argued that the amount of social exchange that employees experience while on the job is mediated by two factors: the quality of the relationship between a supervisor and the employee (Graen & Scandura, 1987) and the quality of the relationship between the employee and the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The quality of the relationship between supervisors and employees can be illustrated in Graen and Scandura’s (1987) leader-member exchange theory, which states that parties will exchange information if they perceive the other party as having valuable information and the exchanges are considered fair and equitable. Information transactions that are perceived to be equitable are supportive and informally characterized by high levels of trust (Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002), two-way communication (Dansereau, 1995), support from supervisor (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), and more useful feedback (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Organizations that promote high levels of leader-member exchange were also found to benefit from higher levels of job satisfaction (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). The quality of the relationship between employee and organization is illustrated in Eisenberger et al.’s (1987) perceived organizational support (POS) theory, which states that employees who perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being are more likely to have reduced absenteeism. Organizations that are perceived to be supportive of their employees are associated with increased levels of job involvement and affective commitment (O’Driscoll & Randall, 1999). Eisenberger, Stinglhamber,
Vandenberghhe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) found employee perceptions of supervisor support was a mediating factor between POS and affective commitment as indicated by intentions to turnover.

In sum, employees who identify their work culture as trustworthy and supportive of the free exchange of information will be more likely to positively respond to performance feedback. Employees working in such a work culture may also exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction.

**Job Satisfaction**

Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as an emotional state resulting from the pleasurable or positive appraisal of one’s job or job experiences. Freeman (1977) further conceptualized job satisfaction as a subjective variable that relates more to “what people say” than “what people do”. The subjectivity of this work-related, emotional state stems from the various environmental factors influencing employees as they conduct routine and novel job tasks. Employee job satisfaction has been at the forefront of organizational research since the 1920’s and has been given additional support due to its recent association with transformational leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) and employee engagement (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002).

Job satisfaction has also been linked to a number of organizational and individual variables. Specifically, an employee’s perception of job satisfaction is related to the degree of supervision (Comer, Machleit, & Lagace, 1989), consideration and feedback (Teas, 1981), participation (Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1982), task clarity (Ting, 1996), role clarity (Kohli, 1985), and job involvement (Dubinsky & Skinner, 1984). Continuing this line of research, Kim (2002) found three overarching characteristics of
managers to be strongly predictive of high levels of employee satisfaction: participative management style, participative strategic planning processes, and effective supervisory communications. Employees who work in environments where managers participate in communicating job expectations and task objectives and involve employees in the organization's planning process reported lower turnover and absenteeism, which are correlates of job satisfaction (Kim, 2002).

Job satisfaction has also been widely studied in organizations because it is thought to be positively associated with employee job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Yet, the link between job satisfaction and job performance has been one of the most elusive conceptual relationships in human behavior research. Elton Mayo's introduction of time and motion studies at Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant in the 1920's (Sundstrom, McIntyre, Halfhill, & Richards, 2000) spurred the research of employee satisfaction beyond the realm of management oversight into the mainstream of job and organizational characteristics and employee reactions. Despite numerous initial studies finding little to no evidence of a relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (e.g., Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Schwab & Cummings, 1970), a meta-analysis conducted by Petty, McGee, and Cavender (1984), established a medium association ($r = .31$) between overall job satisfaction and job performance. More recently, Judge et al. (2001) again found a medium relationship ($r = .30$) between overall job satisfaction and job performance. Judge et al. (2001) also revisited Iaffaldano and Muchinsky's (1985) findings and, after recalculating their reliability estimates using inter-rater agreement instead of internal consistency, concluded the corrected effect size actually reached medium levels, at $r = .33$ (Cohen, 1992).
Research has also focused on possible moderator variables of satisfaction related to changes in performance, such as workspace characteristics (Oldham & Fried, 1987; Teas, 1981), job characteristics (Hackman & Lawler, 1971), organization structure (Berger & Cummings, 1979) and dissatisfaction variables, such as absenteeism (Carsten & Spector, 1987) and self-initiated job change (Ross & Zander, 1957).

Performance feedback can also help employees in their ability to use their job to reach higher levels of satisfaction. Vroom’s (1964) expectancy model states that an employee’s satisfaction with a job results from the instrumentality of the job for attaining other outcomes and the valence, or value of those outcomes. Herzberg (1966) described these outcomes in terms of motivator factors that satisfy an employee’s desire for self-fulfillment. Such factors as opportunities for personal growth, use of knowledge, and recognition for doing a good job, interesting work, and meaningful, important work support an employee’s job satisfaction (Furnham, Forde, & Ferrari, 1999). Teas (1981) reaffirmed these conclusions and found, among others, that company feedback and feedback from the job both highly correlated with job satisfaction. More recently, Rosen, Levy, and Hall (2006) found a significant link between feedback environment and the construct of morale, exhibited by job satisfaction and affective commitment. Anseel and Lievens (2007) also found similar results linking the feedback environment with employee job satisfaction in a study conducted in Belgium. Therefore, it appears that employees are willing to exhibit more behaviors conducive to higher levels of job performance if they perceive their organizational culture as supportive of characteristics that encourage employee job satisfaction.
Teas (1981) also found a strong positive relationship between performance feedback and satisfaction with supervision. Performance feedback from supervisors and others is believed to reinforce employees’ perception that they are competent in a given activity (VandeWalle, 2001). Perceptions of competence are directly related to self-efficacy and, consequently, job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). An employee who is able to receive relevant feedback in a timely manner will have less performance ambiguity. Employees who have reduced levels of performance ambiguity will be more likely to perform at a higher level and ultimately, have higher levels of job satisfaction.

Consequently, the more positively employees perceive their performance and behaviors to be effective, the more likely they will have high job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). Feedback that is presented in an informal context may be more likely to be perceived by employees as timely and therefore, relevant since there are no administrative barriers or disconnect from daily activities. Employees who receive informal feedback may also have increased levels of job performance and levels of job satisfaction due to reduced levels of performance ambiguity.
Chapter II

Rationale and Hypotheses

Graen and Scandura’s (1987) leader-member exchange theory states that parties will exchange information if they perceive the other party as having valuable information and the exchanges are considered fair and equitable. Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) POS theory states that employees who perceive their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being are more likely to have reduced absenteeism and increased job involvement and affective commitment (O’Driscoll & Randall, 1999). Eisenberger et al. (2002) contributed to this theory by finding that employee perceptions of supervisor support mediated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. An organizational culture that provides employees with high quality relationships between both employee and employer, and employee and organization will be more likely to provide employees with opportunities for social exchange (Masterson et al., 2000; Rosen et al., 2006). Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1*: Employees who report high levels of perceived organizational support will report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor, as measured by leader-member exchange.

Employees who perceive a higher quality leader-member social exchange will more likely have higher levels of trust (Cropanzano et al., 2002), better two-way communication (Dansereau, 1995), more support from supervisor (Dansereau et al.,
1975), more useful feedback (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and higher job satisfaction (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). Information communicated in a descriptive, specific, interactive, well-timed, and clear way outlines the basic characteristics of effective feedback (Kolb et al., 1980). Informal feedback communicates information that has the potential to meet these characteristics. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 2:_ Employees who perceive higher levels of social exchange (as measured via leader-member exchange scores) will report increased levels of informal feedback.

Feedback from outside resources has the ability to expedite discrepancy acknowledgement and redirect behavior towards actualizing more favorable performance (Smith & Knight, 1959) and reducing uncertainty (Ashford, 1986). Uncertainty concerning behavior discrepancies has been found to be positively associated with feedback-seeking behavior (Crawford, 1974), stress (Ashford, 1988) and negatively associated with job satisfaction (Ashford et al., 1989), commitment (Hui & Lee, 2000), and trust in the organization (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Additionally, Teas (1981), Rosen et al. (2006), and Anseel and Lievens (2007) found that feedback from the company was positively related to job satisfaction. Given its frequent occurrence, informal feedback also has the ability to combat uncertainty-seeking behavior and reduce performance ambiguity, which may lead to increased job satisfaction. Consequently, the following is hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 3:_ Employees who receive informal feedback will report higher levels of job satisfaction.
An individual’s level of self-efficacy will influence their ability to use feedback to self-regulate their behavior (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). If employees positively interpret behavioral feedback on a task, their self-efficacy will increase and they will be more motivated to direct their energy towards the task. Additionally, employees with high levels of self-efficacy will be more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Judge et al., 2001). Because informal feedback is likely to occur more frequently than formal feedback, informal feedback may result in increased levels of self-efficacy because it is more likely to be timely and relevant, which should allow an employee to positively interpret behavioral feedback on a task. This positive interpretation regarding feedback of one’s performance will thus likely increase their self-efficacy. This will in turn result in higher levels of job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). Consequently, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 4:** Self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between informal feedback and job satisfaction.

The effect informal feedback has on self-efficacy will be dependent on the goal orientation of an employee. Employees with a performance orientation will have higher levels of self-efficacy only when the feedback is perceived as positive (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 5:** Goal orientation will moderate the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy, such that as performance goal orientation increases, positive feedback will be related to higher self-efficacy. There is no parallel moderation hypothesis proposed for learning goal orientation.
Chapter III

Method

Participants

The sample was taken from Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online survey tool where surveys are posted and individuals may freely participate in surveys of their choosing. Only individuals currently living in the United States were allowed to participate. Only those participants with a 90% HIT rate, and those who reported a current status as an enrolled graduate student or as someone who had taken graduate level courses in the past were eligible to participate. A total of 106 participants completed the survey. There were 45 males (42%) and 61 females (58%). Participants' age ranged from 20 to 55; 19 were between 20-25, 20 were between 26-30, 22 were between 31-35, 9 were between 36-40, 18 were between 41-45, 4 were between 46-50, and 13 were between 51-55. Participants' supervisory level ranged from non-supervisor to senior executive with majority level being non-supervisor (54%). Participants' tenure ranged from 0-6 months to 16+ years; 6 reported 0-6 months, 11 reported 7-12 months, 35 reported 1-3 years, 27 reported 4-6 years, 11 reported 7-10 years, 11 reported 11-15 years, and 4 reported 16+ years. A total of 31 participants were currently enrolled in a graduate program (29%) and 68 participants were formerly enrolled. Seven participants
reported that they currently or formerly attended graduate level classes but failed to
designate one or the other.

Measures

Social exchange. Social exchange was measured using the Leader-Member
Exchange Scale short-form (Naidoo, Scherbaum, Goldstein, & Graen, 2011; see
Appendix A for the source of the survey). The Leader-Member Exchange Scale was
designed to assess how leader-member social exchange can affect work attitudes and
behaviors. The scale consisted of six items measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1
(rarely) to 5 (very often). An example question is, “my supervisor has respect for my
capabilities.” Higher scores reflected higher levels of leader member exchange. The
internal consistency reliability for the Leader-Member Exchange Scale has been shown to
be .95 with corrected item total correlations ranging from .84 to .90 (Naidoo et al., 2011).
Evidence for construct validity was provided using a confirmatory principal component
factor analysis which supported the one-factor model (Naidoo et al., 2011). The
coefficient alpha for this study was .90.

Perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support was
measured using the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support short-form (Eisenberger
et al., 1986). This scale consists of eight items covering two facets: valuation of
employees’ contribution and care about employees’ well-being (see Appendix A for the
source). An example question is, “the organization values my contribution to its well-
being.” All items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to
6 (strongly agree). The internal consistency reliability is approximated at .97 with inter-
item correlations ranging from .71 to .84 (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Support for construct
validity was established through a confirmatory factor analysis which showed items loading strongest to the one-factor model (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Evidence for concurrent validity was demonstrated with periods of absenteeism predicted in the correct direction (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The coefficient alpha for this study was .96.

**Informal feedback.** Informal feedback was measured using the Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). The Feedback Environment Scale was devised as a more comprehensive tool organizations can use to understand their feedback environment. This scale consists of 63 items (32 for the supervisor and 31 for the coworker) covering seven facets: source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, favorable feedback, unfavorable feedback, source availability, and promotes feedback seeking (see Appendix A for the source). Each item was phrased as a behavioral statement. An example question is, “my supervisor is generally familiar with my performance on the job.” All subscales were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Parallel items were created for the seven FES facets that reflected the supervisor and coworker sets. The internal consistency reliability for the Supervisor factor ranged from .82 to .92 for the seven FES facets (Steelman et al., 2004). The internal consistency reliability for the Coworker factor ranged from .74 to .92 for the seven FES facets (Steelman et al., 2004). The seven factor model provided evidence for discriminant validity and suggested that it was a stronger fit than previous one- or two-factor feedback environment models (Steelman et al., 2004). Evidence of construct, concurrent and predictive validity were also found with the subscales of the FES model (Steelman et al., 2004). The coefficient alpha of the Supervisor scale for this
study was .96. The coefficient alpha of the Coworker scale for this study was .95. The two scales were combined to measure the overall informal feedback environment.

**Goal orientation.** Goal orientation was measured using the Goal Orientation Scale (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). The Goal Orientation Scale empirically assesses the various factors associated with goal orientation (see Appendix A for the source). This scale consists of 16 items covering two facets: performance goal orientation and learning goal orientation. Each item was phrased as a behavioral statement. An example question is, "I prefer to do things that I can do well rather than things that I do poorly." All constructs were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency reliability for the performance goal orientation factor ranged from .68 to .81, whereas the internal consistency reliability for the learning goal orientation factor ranged from .79 to .85 (Button et al., 1996). Construct validity was established using a confirmatory factor analysis which supported the two-factor model, \( x^2(169, N = 374) = 427.88, p < .001; \text{RMSEA} = .06; \text{GFI} = .89 \) (Button et al., 1996). The coefficient alpha of the performance goal orientation scale for this study was .80. The coefficient alpha of the learning goal orientation scale for this study was .90.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy was measured using the Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, et al., 1982). The Self-Efficacy Scale was developed to show that personal mastery expectations are a primary element in behavioral change. This scale consists of two facets; general and social; however, for this study, only the general self-efficacy scale was used in the survey because the general portion of the measure more easily relates to beliefs about work (see Appendix A for the source). The scale consists of 17 items with each item phrased as a behavioral statement. An example question is, "when I make plan,
I am certain I can make them work.” All constructs were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The higher the score, the higher the expectations of self-efficacy. Internal reliability for the general self-efficacy scale has been shown to be .86 (Sherer et al., 1982). Construct validity for the scale was assessed using scales related to personal self-efficacy: the Internal-External (I-E) Control Scale, Personal Control Subscale of the I-E, Ego Strength Scale, and a Self-Esteem Scale (Sherer et al., 1982). The I-E Control Scale measures locus of control and individuals with an internal locus of control are expected to have high self-efficacy. The Personal Control Subscale of the I-E measures the extent “one believes that one controls one’s own life,” and individuals who score low on this are expected to have high self-efficacy. The Ego Strength Scale measures determination, persistence, social effectiveness, and psychological adjustment, and individuals who score high on this scale should have moderately high self-efficacy. The Self-Esteem Scale measures one’s self-worth, and individuals who score low on this are expected to have high self-efficacy. Criterion-related validity was established by showing a positive relationship to vocational, educational, and military success of participants (Sherer et al., 1982). The coefficient alpha for this study was .93.

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured using a single-item discrepancy-based measure of job satisfaction, “Overall, how satisfied are you with your job” (Nagy, 2002). In addition, five questions measuring five facets: work itself, pay, promotions, supervisor, and coworkers were assessed using a five single-item discrepancy-based measure of job satisfaction (Nagy, 2002; see Appendix A for the source). Each item was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all satisfying) to 5 (very satisfying).
The minimum reliability estimate for this scale and the Job Descriptive Index ranged from .60 to .72, with a mean reliability estimate of .63 (Nagy, 2002). An internal consistency reliability index cannot be computed for this measure due to the facets containing only single-items. In development of the measure, a correlation of .90 was used as the true correlation between the single-item and multiple-item measures to correct for possible attenuation. Convergent validity was supported with a positive relationship to the Job Descriptive Index (e.g., work itself; $r = .65, p < .01$; Nagy, 2002). Criterion-related validity was obtained with strong, near exact correlations of work itself and promotions reported in previous research (Nagy, 2002).

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, name of position, supervisory level and tenure (see Appendix B). For position, respondents indicated what job they were referring to when completing the survey and whether their position involved managing others (senior executive, manager, or team leader), or whether they were a non-supervisory employee. Tenure was measured using seven intervals, of 0 to six months, seven to 12 months, one to three years, four to six years, seven to ten years, 11-15 years, and 16 years or more.

**Procedure**

After the IRB approved the study (see Appendix C), the researcher collected data by posting the survey on MTurk. The researcher posted a request for participants who were current graduate students or had taken graduate level courses in the past. Only those with a 90% HIT rate were eligible to participate via MTurk. These participants were offered 50 cents to complete the survey. If the participants agreed to complete the study, they were directed to the survey via a link posted on the site. When a participant clicked
on the survey’s hyperlink, they were directed to a surveymonkey webpage. The initial screen presented the participant with the survey’s purpose and requested them to read and consent to participate (see Appendix D). At the beginning of the survey, participants read an introductory sentence asking them to, “Think of the most recent position you’ve worked in where you were supervised and had periodic interaction with coworkers. Use this position when responding to the questions.” This statement was included so participants could anchor their responses to one position that met all of the measures’ requirements. The survey consisted of 120 questions, including three quality check items, and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. An example of a quality check item is “the answer to this question is 6.” After all questions were completed, participants were requested to fill out their basic demographic information. After completion of the survey, the researcher ensured that that all the study’s quality checks were answered accurately, and if so, the participants were paid 50 cents for their participation.

The order of the survey was counterbalanced as follows: one-half of the participants received the Feedback Environment Scale- Supervisor, Self-Efficacy Scale, Leader-Member Exchange Scale, Goal Orientation Scale, Job Satisfaction Scale, Perceived Organizational Support Scale, and Feedback Environment Scale- Coworker, in that order. The other half of the participants received the same scales, except the Supervisor and Coworker FES scales were switched. That is, half of the surveys had the Supervisor FES scale first and Coworker scale last, and half of the surveys had the Coworker FES scale first and the Supervisor scale last.
Chapter IV

Results

A Pearson Product-moment correlation was conducted to test Hypothesis 1, which examined if employees who reported high levels of perceived organizational support would report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor. Perceived organizational support was correlated with leader member exchange. This hypothesis was supported, $r(104) = .64, p < .001$.

A Pearson Product-moment correlation was also conducted to test Hypothesis 2, which investigated if employees who perceive higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor would report increased levels of informal feedback. Leader member exchange was correlated with informal feedback. This hypothesis was supported, $r(104) = .67, p < .001$.

Additionally, a Pearson Product-moment correlation was conducted to test Hypothesis 3, which examined if employees who receive informal feedback would report higher levels of job satisfaction. Informal feedback was correlated with overall job satisfaction. This correlation was significant, $r(105) = .57, p < .001$; hence, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 was examined using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) test of mediation. Hypothesis 4 proposed that self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction. According to Baron and Kenny (1986)
there are three steps to determine if self-efficacy mediated the relationship between informal feedback and job satisfaction. First, it was necessary to regress the mediator (self-efficacy) on the predictor variable (informal feedback). This correlation was significant, $r(104) = .32, p < .01$. Second, it was necessary to regress the criterion variable (job satisfaction) on the predictor variable (informal feedback). This correlation was also significant, $r(104) = .57, p < .001$. Third, it was necessary to regress the criterion variable (job satisfaction) on both the predictor variable (informal feedback) and on the mediator (self-efficacy). A hierarchal regression was conducted with overall job satisfaction as the criterion variable, informal feedback as the predictor variable, and self-efficacy as the covariate. In order to demonstrate that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction, this regression should not be significant. The results of the analysis did find the regression to not be significant, $\beta = .10, t(1, 103) = 1.10, p = .28$. Given that the correlation between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction was significant, the correlation between self-efficacy and overall job satisfaction was significant, and the regression between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction was not significant when controlling for the covariate (self-efficacy), we did find evidence for full mediation. Overall, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Lastly, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 5, which investigated if goal orientation moderated the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy, such that as performance goal orientation increases, positive feedback would be related to higher self-efficacy; however, the level of learning goal orientation would not be related to self-efficacy based on the type of feedback. One participant had
equal scores for both performance and learning goal orientations so their score was not included in the analysis. A hierarchical linear regression was conducted with self-efficacy as the criterion variable and informal feedback as the predictor variable and performance goal orientation as the moderator variable. Informal feedback and goal orientation were entered in step one, and the multiplicative term of informal feedback and goal orientation in step two. The moderation for performance goal orientation was not supported, $\Delta R^2 = .002$, $F(1, 101) = .21, p = .65$.

Supplemental Analysis

A Pearson Product-moment correlation was also conducted between informal feedback and the five facets of job satisfaction. The effect of informal feedback on satisfaction with work itself was significant, $r(104) = .50, p < .001$, as was satisfaction with pay, $r(104) = .35, p < .001$, satisfaction with promotions, $r(104) = .48, p < .001$, satisfaction with supervision, $r(104) = .66, p < .001$, and satisfaction with coworkers, $r(104) = .55, p < .001$ (see Table 1).

The effect of supervisory level was examined using a one-way ANOVA on each of the study variables; informal feedback, self-efficacy, leader-member exchange, job satisfaction, and perceived organizational support. There was a significant difference of supervisory level on perceived organizational support, $F(3, 102) = 3.12, p < .05$; however, Tukey post hoc tests revealed that none of the pairwise comparisons involving any of the supervisory levels were significantly different from each other; non-supervisor ($M = 4.44; SD = .20$), team leader ($M = 5.01; SD = .33$), manager ($M = 5.12; SD = .30$), and senior executive ($M = 5.08; SD = .66$).

The effect of tenure was examined using a one-way ANOVA on each of the study variables; informal feedback, self-efficacy, leader-member exchange, job satisfaction,
and perceived organizational support. There were significant differences among tenure on overall job satisfaction, $F(6, 99) = 2.46, p < .05$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that participants in the tenure range 0-6 months ($M = 3.00; SD = .63$) were significantly more satisfied with their pay than participants in the tenure range 11-15 years ($M = 4.64; SD = .51$; see Table 2).
Table 1

Correlational Matrix for Key Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Pay satisfaction</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4. Promotion satisfaction</td>
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<td>.48**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5. Supervisor satisfaction</td>
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<td>.45**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.55**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>6. Coworker satisfaction</td>
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<td>.33**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td>7. Self-efficacy</td>
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<td>.53**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Leader-member exchange</td>
<td>.63**</td>
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<td>.46**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Perceived organizational support</td>
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<td>.50**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.75**</td>
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<td>10. Informal Feedback</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). **
Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). *
Table 2

Effect of Tenure on Pay Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Tenure</th>
<th>(J) Tenure</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.40691</td>
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<td>.35355</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>-.5247</td>
<td>.36187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7-10 years</td>
<td>-.4242</td>
<td>.40691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>-1.2424*</td>
<td>.40691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>-.7083</td>
<td>.51754</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0-6 months</td>
<td>.3182</td>
<td>.40691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>-.0800</td>
<td>.27622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>-.2065</td>
<td>.28679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.1061</td>
<td>.34188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>-.9242</td>
<td>.34188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>-.3902</td>
<td>.46813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>0-6 months</td>
<td>.3981</td>
<td>.35355</td>
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<td>11-15 years</td>
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<td>.42257</td>
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<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>0-6 months</td>
<td>.5247</td>
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<td>7-12 months</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>1.2424*</td>
<td>.9242</td>
<td>.8443*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>.7083</td>
<td>.3902</td>
<td>.3102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on observed means.
* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
The error term is Mean Square (Error) = .643.
Chapter V

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the association between performance feedback and job satisfaction. Specifically, this study demonstrated the effect of supervisor and coworker informal performance feedback on employees' perceptions of behavior ambiguity, and the link of informal performance feedback to job satisfaction. It was believed that increased performance feedback would reduce employee perceptions of behavior ambiguity, and that this reduced behavioral ambiguity would be associated with increased levels of job satisfaction. The results of this study supported most of the proposed hypotheses.

It was not surprising to find that those employees with higher quality relationships with their organizations would report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor, and that higher levels of social exchange were related to increased levels of informal performance feedback. Previous research has found that organizations that are perceived to promote the exchange of information will have employees who have high levels of trust (Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002), two-way communication (Dansereau, 1995), support from supervisor (Dansereau, Graen, & Ilaga, 1975), and more useful feedback (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). These results suggest that organizations can benefit from high quality relationships between employees and the organization as a whole and between managers and subordinates. Previous research has found that those employees
who perceive high LMX receive higher performance ratings than those in with low LMX (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). Similarly, this study found that employees who had a higher quality relationship with their organization reported a higher level of social exchange with their supervisor, and those who perceived higher levels of social exchange reported an increased level of informal feedback.

The second part of this study investigated the link between informal feedback and job satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 was found to positively support this link. Previous research has demonstrated that the feedback environment present in an organization is an important aspect of not only job satisfaction, but affective commitment as well (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006). An organization’s ability to improve and/or increase the level of performance feedback communication between manager-subordinate and coworker-coworker could have beneficial effects on the level of job satisfaction reported by an employee. These effects can benefit employee training, job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction (Greller & Herold, 1975) by communicating what is important to the organization, how to implement the organization’s strategy, and what is needed to drive employees to achieve results (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).

Another important contribution of this study was the findings related to self-efficacy and its mediating role between informal feedback and job satisfaction. Judge and Bono (2001) demonstrated that self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability were some of the best trait predictors of both job satisfaction and job performance, and Schunk (1982) and Schunk and Swartz (1993) aptly found that attributional feedback was linked to perceptions of higher self-efficacy, task involvement, and skill development. The results from this study suggest that organizations can benefit
INFORMAL FEEDBACK AND JOB SATISFACTION

from increased levels of overall job satisfaction if managers and coworkers are able to properly convey performance feedback in such a way that it increases the recipient's perceptions of self-efficacy. Follow up analyses further examined the mediating role of self-efficacy and its role between informal feedback and the other five facets of jobs satisfaction (work itself, pay, promotions, supervisor, and coworker). Full mediation was found for pay ($\beta = .02, t(1, 103) = .12, p = .90$), promotions ($\beta = -.16, t(1, 103) = -1.25, p = .22$), supervisor ($\beta = -.02, t(1, 103) = -15, p = .88$), and coworker ($\beta = -.10, t(1, 103) = -1.04, p = .30$). These finding suggest that other variables (except work itself) that make up an employee's perceptions of satisfaction with their job is related to the belief the employee has concerning their competence in performing a task which is based on previous performance feedback they have received.

The final aspect of this study hypothesized that goal orientation would moderate the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy. The failure to find significance suggests that goal orientation would not affect self-efficacy based on if employees received informal performance feedback. These results were surprising and failed to contribute to the work of Bandura and Dweck (1985), Dweck and Leggett (1988), Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996), and others who found that individuals with a performance goal orientation would perceive their ability as high when they received positive performance feedback, whereas individuals with a learning goal orientation would be less likely to perceive informal feedback as reflective of their self-efficacy, and therefore, may affect their self-esteem. This failure to find significance could be due to the research's design, specifically, using a goal orientation measure that dichotomized the construct into only two variables, performance and learning. After Button et al.'s measure
was developed in 1996, Elliot and Church (1997) further conceptualized performance
goal orientation into two unique parts, performance-approach and performance-
avoidance., Elliot and McGregor (2001) also sub-divided learning goal orientation also
into two unique parts, learning-approach and learning avoidance, and DeShon and
Gillespie (2005) theorized goal orientation as more of a continuous variable where
individuals could be simultaneously high or low on both. Future research should look into
this continuous polychotomy which may more reliably measure the true relationship
between informal performance feedback and self-efficacy. A follow up analysis did find
a significant correlation between informal performance feedback and self-efficacy, \( r(104) = .318, p < .001 \). This secondary finding, along with the previous finding relating to
informal feedback with job satisfaction, still emphasizes that timely, relevant feedback as
beneficial to the well-being of employees regardless of their goal orientation. This has
implications for managers when conducting daily performance feedback, and even annual
performance reviews. If conducted properly, the delivery of behavioral feedback has the
potential ability to reduce performance ambiguity which is related to increased self-
efficacy and satisfaction with an employee’s job. Future research should still consider
goal orientation as a potential contributor to how an individual perceives, accepts, desires
to respond, and intends to respond to information concerning their job performance.

Further analyses also examined the effects of the five facets of job satisfaction,
gender, age, tenure, supervisory level, and enrollment status on informal feedback. The
five facets of job satisfaction were found to be significantly and positively correlated with
informal feedback, but gender was not found to influence any of the study’s findings, nor
goal orientation.
Age was found to be different among the types of goal orientation. Specifically, participants in the age categories of 20-25, 26-30, and 31-35 were more likely to have a performance goal orientation than those in the 36-40, 41-45, 46-50 and 51-55 age categories. Those in the 26-30 age category were also more likely to have a performance goal orientation than those in the 36-40, 46-50, and 51-55 groups. Implications of these results suggest that younger employees are more likely to have a performance goal orientation. Managers may benefit from providing performance feedback to these individuals emphasizing positive feedback that promotes their competence with activities, and avoid emphasizing negative feedback that may promote their incompetence.

Supervisory level was also found to be different in terms of preferences in learning orientation. Specifically, the non-supervisor group had a significantly higher percentage of learning orientation than senior executives, whereas the senior executive group had significantly lower percentages of learning goal orientation than managers. Also, non-supervisors had a significantly higher percentage in performance goal orientation than team leaders, managers, and senior executives. Senior executives also had a significantly lower percentage in performance goal orientation than team leaders and managers. These results suggest that learning goal orientation decreases as supervisory level increases. Implications to organizations may mean that as employees progress up the organizational hierarchy, they may be less likely to maintain a mindset willing to learn new material or try novel, unproven techniques to accomplish a goal. Organizations looking to implement new strategies or processes may benefit from emphasizing a learning goal orientation to promote trial and error versus merely meeting performance standards.
Limitations

There are potential limitations of this study that should be considered when interpreting the results. One limitation is that self-reported data may evoke common method bias which can inflate the magnitude of the relationships being investigated (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). Spector (2006) found common method bias to be present but not of a magnitude great enough to be a cause for concern in studies employing a similar methodology to this study.

A second limitation of this study is the use of perceived organizational support to represent employees’ support to the organization instead of to their supervisor. Eisenberger et al. (2002) found that an employee’s level of perceived supervisor support (PSS) mediated the relationship between POS and retention. Their findings suggest that supervisors are the organizations’ first line of contact for employees, and therefore more likely to determine the extent that employees feel their organization is supportive. This final limitation should also not be viewed as a serious concern since POS is thought to contribute unique variance to the amount of social exchange in an organization as opposed to only studying the relationship between supervisor and employee (Masterson et al., 2000). However, future research may want to investigate PSS and its relationship to LMX.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between informal performance feedback and job satisfaction, and the effects of goal orientation, self-efficacy, perceived organizational support and leader member exchange on this relationship. The results showed that perceived organizational support and leader member exchange were positively related, leader member exchange and informal feedback were positively related, informal
feedback and job satisfaction were positively related, and self-efficacy mediated the relationship between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction. However, it was found that goal orientation did not moderate the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy. The implications of this study suggest that organizations could benefit from increased levels of job satisfaction if supervisors and coworkers provided employees with an increased level of informal performance feedback regardless of an employee’s goal orientation.
Chapter VI

Summary

Performance feedback is an integral part of an employee's ability to remain productive and focused on job-related tasks and goals. Behavioral feedback in the work setting has been found to be central to employee training, job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction (Greller & Herold, 1975).

Annett (1969) thought of feedback as information about current or past behavior that is received by an individual. How an individual interprets the feedback can be affected by the credibility and power of the feedback’s source, the message the feedback conveys, and the feedback’s recipient (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). These three aspects of feedback are then believed to affect how the individual perceives, accepts, desires to respond, and intends to respond to the information (Ilgen et al., 1979). All of these effects of feedback need to be taken into consideration when constructing systems and processes to manage performance in organizations.

Performance feedback can be differentiated into two kinds: formal and informal. Formal feedback can be thought of as traditional, structured annual or semi-annual performance appraisals. In contrast, informal feedback is defined as regular, day-to-day feedback that employees receive from their managers, coworkers and clients with the goal of managing performance (Farr, 1993).
In terms of uses, feedback research has primarily focused on employee training (Hazucha, Hezlett, & Schneider, 1993), job performance (Erickson & Allen, 2003), perceptions of politics (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006), and motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999), but few studies have focused on the potential relationship between performance feedback and job satisfaction, particularly informal feedback. Hence the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between informal performance feedback and job satisfaction. This study broadens the research on the nature of informal feedback and its function in employee’s satisfaction with their perceptions of behavior ambiguity. First, the paper will discuss performance feedback and job satisfaction’s relationship to behavioral ambiguity. Then, hypotheses will be introduced to further explore the feedback-job satisfaction relationship.

Feedback needs to be perceived by the recipient as accurate and precise in order to increase the possibility of behavior change (Ilgen et al., 1979). Once behaviors are identified as satisfactory or unsatisfactory the appraisal then needs to be communicated to the employee. In most organizations, employee feedback is incorporated under the umbrella of performance management. Properly utilizing performance management systems depends on employee relationships with their managers, and the manager’s ability to successfully communicate information to aid in positive employee behavior change.

Performance management systems play an important role in the effectiveness of uncertainty reduction and behavior reinforcement because it aids in an employee’s self-regulation process through goal setting. By collecting informational feedback, employees will detect a discrepancy when these standards are not met or are not perceived to be
effective. The corresponding actions taken by an employee to alleviate or reduce a
discrepancy is the basis for behavior change and learning. The act of seeking or receiving
feedback will reduce any perceived uncertainty in an employee's behavior and help them
acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary for successful performance.
One way employees can acquire the KSAs to be a successful performer is through self-
regulation.

In formal performance management settings, self-regulation occurs during
periodic performance reviews. Employees are appraised by various feedback sources and
presented with information that will either coincide or conflict with current behavioral
beliefs. The longer the time lapse between the initial behavior and an appraisal of that
behavior, the less opportunity the employee will have to reduce or eliminate unintended
discrepancies. In contrast, informal feedback does not rely on specific appraisal events to
trigger the exchange of behavioral information so discrepancies can be addressed in
closer temporal proximity to the initial behavior.

When the discrepancy between desired and real performance is reduced or
eliminated, an employee will no longer recognize any behavioral uncertainty and they
will be satisfied with their performance. It is therefore necessary for employers to have a
performance management system to help inform employees of differences in their present
performance and their desired performance in order to reach their goals.

Employees can receive performance feedback from the organization, supervisor,
co-workers, the task, and "one's own self" (Greller & Herold, 1975). Feedback from
outside resources has the ability to expedite discrepancy acknowledgement and redirect
behavior towards actualizing more favorable performance (Smith & Kight, 1959) and
reducing uncertainty (Ashford, 1986). Yet, how employees respond to performance feedback is determined in part to their goal orientation and level of self-efficacy.

Dweck and Leggett (1988) found people tend to have either a learning orientation or a performance orientation. An employee who has a learning goal orientation will be more inclined to view knowledge as incrementally learned, and will be more responsive to feedback that will help them understand something novel or to develop competence in a given activity. A person who holds this goal orientation will also perceive positive feedback as reinforcement that they are acquiring knowledge about a certain concept, and negative feedback as an opportunity to correct mistakes and develop additional capabilities (VandeWalle, 2001). In contrast, individuals who adopt a performance goal orientation will be more disposed to believe KSAs are fixed, and will respond more to feedback that validates their competencies and promotes their self-esteem. Those individuals will also perceive positive feedback as a reflection of their competence with an activity, and negative feedback as a sign of incompetence that will challenge their self-efficacy (VandeWalle, 2001).

An individual’s level of self-efficacy also influences their ability to use feedback to self-regulate their behavior (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Self-efficacy is important in the context of feedback because information stemming from feedback will increase or decrease an employee’s expectations that their effort will correspond with goal attainment. Feedback will also decrease perceived ambiguity and increase the probability that continued effort will result in goal attainment (House, 1971).

Self-efficacy will also impact individuals with different goal orientations. As stated previously, a performance oriented individual will only demonstrate effort if it will
produce continued reassurance in his/her competence (Janssen & Prins, 2007). For performance goal oriented individuals, positive feedback will increase their self-confidence and reinforce their perception that they are competent in the given situation (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). The opposite holds true for negative feedback. Negative feedback will decrease a performance oriented individual’s confidence in their ability to perform in that given situation in the future (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). In contrast, learning goal oriented individuals will perceive both positive and negative feedback as beneficial to their self-efficacy. Positive feedback will reassure learning oriented individuals are performing adequately and negative feedback will cause a readjustment of strategies (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Employees with a learning goal orientation will have a strong belief that their efforts will produce a favorable outcome and will continue their efforts despite any possible set-backs.

The type of organizational culture that employees work in will also have an effect on how employees react to feedback and the extent they feel encouraged to act on it. One type of organizational culture that may be beneficial in terms of feedback acceptance is a culture that promotes social exchange. Social exchange involves the participation of two individuals in a mutually rewarding process (Emerson, 1976). Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000) argued that the amount of social exchange that employees experience while on the job is mediated by two factors; the quality of the relationship between a supervisor and the employee (Graen & Scandura, 1987) and the quality of the relationship between the employee and the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The quality of the relationship between supervisors and employees can be illustrated in Graen and Scandura’s leader-member exchange theory.
Organizations that promote high levels of leader-member exchange were also found to benefit from higher levels of job satisfaction (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). The quality of the relationship between employee and organization is illustrated in Eisenberger et al.'s perceived organizational support (POS) theory.

In sum, employees who identify their work culture as trustworthy and supportive of the free exchange of information will be more likely to positively respond to performance feedback. Employees working in such a work culture may also exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction.

*Job satisfaction* has been linked to a number of organizational and individual variables. Specifically, an employee’s perception of job satisfaction is related to by the degree of supervision (Comer, Machleit, & Lagace, 1989), consideration and feedback (Teas, 1981), participation (Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1982), task clarity (Ting, 1996), role clarity (Kohli, 1985), and job involvement (Dubinsky & Skinner, 1984). Employees who work in environments where managers participate in communicating job expectations and task objectives and involve employees in the organization’s planning process reported lower turnover and absenteeism, which are correlates of job satisfaction (Kim, 2002).

Performance feedback from supervisors and others is believed to reinforce employees’ perception that they are competent in a given activity (VandeWalle, 2001). Perceptions of competence are directly related to self-efficacy and, consequently, job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). An employee who is able to receive relevant feedback in a timely manner will have less performance ambiguity. Employees who have reduced levels of performance ambiguity will be more likely to perform at a higher level and
ultimately, have higher levels of job satisfaction. Consequently, the more positively employees perceive their performance and behaviors to be effective, the more likely they will have high job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). Feedback that is presented in an informal context may be more likely to be perceived by employees as timely and relevant since there are no administrative barriers or disconnect from daily activities. Employees who receive informal feedback may also have increased levels of job performance and levels of job satisfaction due to reduced levels of performance ambiguity. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1*: Employees who report high levels of perceived organizational support will report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor, as measured by leader-member exchange.

*Hypothesis 2*: Employees who perceive higher levels of social exchange (as measured via leader-member exchange scores) will report increased levels of informal feedback.

*Hypothesis 3*: Employees who receive informal feedback will report higher levels of job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 4*: Self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between informal feedback and job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5*: Goal orientation will moderate the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy, such that as performance goal orientation increases, positive feedback will be related to higher self-efficacy. There is no parallel moderation hypothesis proposed for learning goal orientation.
Method

Participants and Setting

The sample was taken from Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online survey tool where surveys are posted and individuals may freely participate in surveys of their choosing. Only individuals currently living in the United States were allowed to participate. Only those participants with a 90% HIT rate, and those who reported a current status as an enrolled graduate student or as someone who had taken graduate level courses in the past were eligible to participate. A total of 106 participants completed the survey. There were 45 males (42%) and 61 females (58%). Participants’ age ranged from 20 to 56+ with an average age between 36 and 40. Participants’ supervisory level ranged from non-supervisor to senior executive with majority level being non-supervisor (54%). Participants’ tenure ranged from 0 months to 16+ years with an average tenure of 1-3 years. A total of 31 participants were currently enrolled in a graduate program (29%) and 68 participants were formerly enrolled. Seven participants reported that they currently or formerly attended graduate level classes but failed to designate one or the other.

Measures

Social exchange. Social exchange was measured using the Leader-Member Exchange Scale short-form (Naidoo, Scherbaum, Goldstein, & Graen, 2011). The scale consists of six items measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (very often). Higher scores reflect higher quality leader member exchanges.

Perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support will be measured using the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support short-form (Eisenberger
et al., 1986). This scale is eight items measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

**Informal feedback.** Informal feedback will be measured using the Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). This scale is 63 items (32 for the supervisor and 31 for the coworker) consisting of seven facets: source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, favorable feedback, unfavorable feedback, source availability, and promotes feedback seeking. All subscales will be measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Goal orientation.** Goal orientation will be measured using the Goal Orientation Scale (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). All constructs will be measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy will be measured using the Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, Maddux, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, & Rogers, 1982). The scale is 17 questions with each item phrased as a behavioral statement. All constructs will be measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction will be measured using a single-item discrepancy-based measure of job satisfaction, “Overall, how satisfied are you with your job” (Nagy, 2002). Each item will be measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all satisfying) to 5 (very satisfying).

**Procedure**

After the IRB approved the study, the researcher collected data by posting the survey on MTurk. The researcher posted a request for participants who were current graduate students or had taken graduate level courses in the past. Only those with a 90%
HIT rate were eligible to participate via MTurk. These participants were offered 50 cents to complete the survey. If the participants agreed to complete the study, they were directed to the survey via a link posted on the site. When a participant clicked on the survey’s hyperlink, they were directed to www.surveymonkey.com/s/workplace_attitudes. At the beginning of the survey, participants read an introductory sentence asking them to, “Think of the most recent position you’ve worked in where you were supervised and had periodic interaction with coworkers. Use this position when responding to the questions.” This statement was included so participants could anchor their responses to one position that met all of the measures’ requirements. The survey consisted of 120 questions, including three quality check items, and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. After all questions were completed, participants were requested to fill out their basic demographic information. After completion of the survey, the researcher ensured that that all the study’s quality checks were answered accurately, and if so, the participants were paid 50 cents for their participation.

The order of the survey will be counterbalanced to account for participant fatigue.

Results

A Pearson Product-moment correlation was conducted to test Hypothesis 1, which examined if employees who reported high levels of perceived organizational support would report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor. Perceived organizational support was correlated with leader member exchange. This hypothesis was supported, \( r(104) = .64, p < .001 \).

A Pearson Product-moment correlation was also conducted to test Hypothesis 2, which investigated if employees who perceive higher levels of social exchange with their
supervisor would report increased levels of informal feedback. Leader member exchange was correlated with informal feedback. This hypothesis was supported, $r(104) = .67, p < .001$.

Additionally, a Pearson Product-moment correlation was conducted to test Hypothesis 3, which examined if employees who receive informal feedback would report higher levels of job satisfaction. Informal feedback was correlated with overall job satisfaction. This correlation was significant, $r(105) = .57, p < .001$; hence, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 was examined using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) test of mediation. Hypothesis 4 proposed that self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction. Given that the correlation between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction was significant ($r(104) = .32, p < .01$), the correlation between self-efficacy and overall job satisfaction was significant ($r(104) = .57, p < .001$), and the regression between informal feedback and overall job satisfaction was not significant when controlling for the covariate (self-efficacy; $\beta = .10, t(1, 103) = 1.10, p = .28$), we did find evidence for full mediation. Overall, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Lastly, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 5, which investigated if goal orientation moderated the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy, such that as performance goal orientation increases, positive feedback would be related to higher self-efficacy; however, the level of learning goal orientation would not be related to self-efficacy based on the type of feedback. The interaction term for performance goal orientation was not supported, $\Delta R^2 = .002, F(1, 101) = .21, p = .65$. 
Discussion

Hypotheses 1 and 2 proposed that employees with higher quality relationships with their organizations would report higher levels of social exchange with their supervisor, and that higher levels of social exchange were related to increased levels of informal performance feedback. These hypotheses were supported. Previous research has found that organizations that are perceived to promote the exchange of information will have employees who have high levels of trust (Croppanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002), two-way communication (Dansereau, 1995), support from supervisor (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), and more useful feedback (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). These results suggest that employees whom had a higher quality relationship with their organization reported a higher level of social exchange with their supervisor, and those who perceived higher levels of social exchange reported an increased level of informal feedback.

Hypothesis 3 investigated the link between informal feedback and job satisfaction and was found to positively support this link. Previous research has demonstrated that the feedback environment present in an organization is an important aspect of not only job satisfaction, but affective commitment as well (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006). An organization’s ability to improve and/or increase the level of performance feedback communication between manager-subordinate and coworker-coworker could have beneficial effects on the level of job satisfaction reported by an employee. These effects can benefit employee training, job performance, and job satisfaction (Greller & Herold, 1975), and communicate what is important to the organization, implement the organization’s strategy, and drive employees to achieve results (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).
Another important contribution of this study was the findings related to self-efficacy and its mediating role between informal feedback and job satisfaction. Judge and Bono (2001) demonstrated that self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability were some of the best trait predictors of both job satisfaction and job performance, and Schunk (1982) and Schunk and Swartz (1993) aptly found that attributional feedback was linked to perceptions of higher self-efficacy, task involvement, and skill development. The results from this study suggest that organizations can benefit from increased levels of overall job satisfaction if managers and coworkers are able to properly convey performance feedback in such a way that it increases the recipient’s perceptions of self-efficacy.

The final aspect of this study hypothesized that goal orientation would moderate the relationship between informal feedback and self-efficacy. The failure to find a significant interaction suggests that individuals will experience an increased level of self-efficacy when they receive increased levels of informal performance feedback regardless of the employee’s goal orientation. This has implications for managers when conducting daily performance feedback and annual performance reviews in that an employee’s goal orientation may not be as strong of a contributor to how they react to feedback when the relevancy, timeliness and specificity of that feedback increases.

Limitations

The self-reported data is one limitation of this study in that it may evoke common method bias which can inflate the magnitude of the relationships being investigated (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). Spector (2006) found common method bias to be present but not of a magnitude great enough to a cause for concern in studies employing a similar methodology to this study. A second limitation is the use of perceived
organizational support to represent employees' support to the organization instead of to their supervisor. This final limitation should also not be viewed as a serious concern since POS is thought to contribute unique variance to the amount of social exchange in an organization as opposed to only studying the relationship between supervisor and employee (Masterson et al., 2000). However, future research may want to investigate PSS and its relationship to LMX.

**Conclusions**

This study was able to find that informal feedback and job satisfaction were positively related, but there was not a significant interaction of goal orientation within the informal feedback and self-efficacy relationship. The evidence provides future research the ability to examine informal performance feedback and its effects on the satisfaction and performance of employees.
References


INFORMAL FEEDBACK AND JOB SATISFACTION


Appendix A

Measures

The Leader-Member Exchange Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is made available in the following reference:


The Perceived Organizational Support Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is available through the University of Houston at www.psychology.uh.edu/pos/questionnaires.asp.

The Feedback Environment Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is made available in the following reference:


The Goal Orientation Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is made available in the following reference:

The Self-Efficacy Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is made available in the following reference:


The Job Satisfaction Scale is protected by copyright so it is not reproduced in this document. This measure is made available in the following reference:

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Gender:
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age:
   - 20-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51-55
   - 56+

3. Name of Position in Organization:
   __________________________________________

4. Current Supervisory Level:
   - Non-supervisor
   - Team Leader
   - Manager
   - Senior Executive

5. Tenure at Current Organization:
   - 0-6 months
   - 7-12 months
   - 1-3 years
   - 4-6 years
   - 7-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16+ years

6. Type of Graduate Program, if applicable:
   __________________________________________
7. Mechanical Turk identification number:
Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

April 5, 2013

Chris Baudler
399 W. Galbraith Rd. #213
Cincinnati, OH 45215

Re: Protocol #1251, *The Role of Informal Performance Feedback in Job Satisfaction*

Dear Mr. Baudler:

The IRB has reviewed the request to modify your study, referenced above. We understand that you will be recruiting participants through Mturk. We are able to continue to approve your study based on the information you provided. Therefore, your above-referenced study, as modified, continues to be approved in the Exempt category under Federal Guidelines 45CFR46.

Please note that if you wish to further modify your study, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

We truly appreciate your efforts and attention to compliance within the spirit of human subject's protection. We wish you great success with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

MEM/sb

c: Mark Nagy, Advisor
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

You are being given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a project conducted through Xavier University. If you decide to participate in the project, please mark "I Agree."

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact Chris Baudler at (314) 704-9948 or Dr. Mark Nagy at (513) 745-1958. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University's Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

The purpose of this survey is to help gain a stronger understanding of workplace attitudes. You were selected as a participant because of your current or previous education in graduate school. This survey will require you to complete 120 questions which will take approximately 25 minutes. After completion of the survey and accurate responses to the quality checks, you will be paid $.50. Your answers in this study will remain anonymous, and you should not experience any risks in part of your answers.

Your participation in this survey is part of my thesis requirement and your responses will be used to advance sciences understanding of employee perceptions of factors that relate to workplace attitudes.

Refusal to participate in this study will have NO EFFECT ON ANY FUTURE SERVICES. You are FREE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PENALTY.

I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to ask questions and to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I freely give my consent to participate in this research project.

☐ I Agree  ☐ I Do Not Agree