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# A self-motives perspective on feedback- seeking behavior: Linking organizational behavior and social psychology research

Frederik Anseel, Filip Lievens and Paul E. Levy

Both the feedback-seeking literature in management and the self-motives domain in social psychology have focused on how motives affect the way in which people acquire information for self-evaluation purposes. Despite apparent conceptual similarities, the implications of research in these domains have not been fully integrated. This paper aims to link research on feedback-seeking behavior to recent theoretical developments in social psychology. First, the current perspective in management on feedback-seeking motives is depicted. Second, a well-established framework of self-motives in social psychology is introduced. Third, similarities and differences between these two motivational perspectives are discussed and a first step towards integration is proposed. Fourth, it is demonstrated how a self-motives perspective might guide future research on six key issues. Self-motives might be useful in identifying new antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior, resolving inconsistencies in the feedback-seeking literature, understanding the interplay among feedback-seeking motives, integrating feedback-seeking and feedback reactions research, examining attitudinal outcomes of feedback-seeking motives, and enhancing the feedback-performance relationship.

## **Introduction**

In the last twenty years, the study of feedback-seeking behavior has probably been one of the

most active research domains in management (organizational behavior). An increasing number of studies have examined how employees take on an active role in the feedback process

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and seek out feedback themselves. By asking for feedback, employees can adjust their goal-directed behavior (Morrison and Weldon 1990), better assess their capabilities (Ashford and Tsui 1991; Williams and Johnson 2000), manage impressions about their performance potential (Ashford and Northcraft 1992), enhance their future effectiveness (Morrison 1993; Renn and Fedor 2001), and 'learn the ropes' of a new job (Morrison 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to link research on feedback-seeking behavior in organizations to the self-motives literature in social psychology. Feedback-seeking behavior in organizations is historically grounded in social psychology (see Ashford and Cummings 1983). In recent years, however, the social psychological literature on self-motives has taken a broader perspective, and now deals with how and why people seek, select, process and react to self-relevant information across a variety of contexts. In this paper, we argue that theoretical perspectives in social psychology are of great importance for gaining a better understanding of feedback-seeking in organizations. Therefore, this paper aims to trace the study of feedback-seeking behavior back to its roots in social psychology.

The relevance of self-motives research in social psychology for feedback-seeking research in management has previously been suggested by Williams *et al.* (1999, 975):

Social psychologists have examined the effects of evaluation apprehension on individual's behavior in evaluative situations and have observed effects similar to those found in the current study. It may be helpful for future researchers to examine the current findings in light of this literature, thus expanding the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.

Vice versa, social psychological research has tended to overlook conceptual and empirical developments in the management literature on feedback-seeking, as is reflected in the following observation of one of the prominent researchers in the self-motives domain:

It is embarrassing to realize that social psychological theory provides little basis for generating predictions about when people simply ask others for feedback about their personal qualities ... it has not previously been identified as an important information source for self-evaluation (Taylor *et al.* 1995, 1283).

So far, the core ideas of self-motives theory have yet to be adequately articulated and integrated. The relevance and importance of the self-motives literature for feedback-seeking research stems from the fact that all researchers in the feedback-seeking domain have attributed a central role to motives as key drivers of feedback-seeking behavior (Ashford *et al.* 2003; Morrison 2002). Despite agreement about the importance of motives underlying feedback-seeking, the theoretical underpinnings concerning the motivational background of feedback-seeking are currently underdeveloped. As a consequence, tests of feedback-seeking models, as well as their applications, might be using an incomplete set of ideas. More specifically, several important questions regarding the role of these motives have remained unaddressed: Does the current perspective represent the most complete and parsimonious model of feedback-seeking motives? Have all relevant constructs related to feedback-seeking motives been identified? Under which conditions might some motives become more important than others in determining feedback-seeking behavior? How do various motives interact to guide feedback-seeking behavior? How might motives impact on the consequences (reactions, attitudes and performance) of feedback-seeking behavior? To address these questions, we propose to use the Self-Concept Enhancing Tactician Model (SCENT, Sedikides and Strube 1997) from social psychology as an integrative framework that might increase our understanding of the interplay between four different self-motives in determining feedback-seeking behavior and its outcomes.

In sum, despite the fact that seeking feedback in organizations is essentially a self-evaluation process, the management literature on feedback-seeking has not fully kept pace with the social

psychological advances in research on self-motives and vice versa. Therefore, this paper starts to link research on feedback-seeking behavior to recent theoretical developments in social psychology. As will be shown below, the integration of these two distinct albeit conceptually similar literatures might advance not only our understanding of motives of feedback-seeking behavior. In addition, it might contribute to greater insight into the effectiveness of feedback interventions in organizations. It is important to note that self-motives should not be seen as a separate or alternative framework for studying feedback-seeking behavior. In contrast, the self-motives framework presented may help in integrating previous work and may provide a more fine-grained framework for studying motives in future feedback research.

The structure of this paper is as follows. We start by reviewing the literature on motives of feedback-seeking behavior in the management literature. Second, we introduce the SCENT model, which integrates four well-established self-motives in social psychology. Third, we compare the two motivational perspectives and delineate how self-motives can broaden the theoretical basis of feedback-seeking research. Fourth, we highlight the added value of this framework by outlining several implications for future research. In particular, we argue that the proposed self-motives model might advance our knowledge concerning six key issues in the feedback-seeking and broader feedback domain.

## Method

Given Ashford *et al.*'s (2003) excellent review of feedback-seeking research, it seems unnecessary for us to provide a systematic review of the same research in this paper. However, for readers to grasp fully the differences and similarities between the current perspective and the SCENT model of self-motives, we felt that it was important to provide a selective review of the current status of empirical research concerning motives of feedback-seeking behavior in the organizational behavior literature.

To be included in this selective review, we used the following criteria. First, a study had to examine empirically a relationship between feedback-seeking behavior (direct or indirect) and one or more antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior. Given that this review looks at motives as the primary drivers of feedback-seeking behavior, we included only studies examining antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior (and not outcomes). For a more exhaustive review including outcome studies, we refer the interested reader to Ashford *et al.* (2003). Second, to differentiate the organizational behavior perspective from the perspective in social psychology, studies had to be conducted in an (simulated) organizational context. Thus, field studies conducted in an actual organization or laboratory studies simulating an organizational context were included. Studies that examined feedback-seeking in other contexts (e.g. clinical settings, interpersonal relationships) were excluded. Thus, in this selective review, we specifically focused on motives of feedback-seeking in organizational behavior.

We searched a number of electronic databases (PsychLit, Social Science Citation Index and Current Contents) to detect relevant studies using key words such as feedback-seeking, information-seeking, help-seeking and feedback. Second, all articles citing Ashford and Cummings (1983), as indicated by the Social Sciences Citation Index, were examined. Third, we scrutinized reference lists from obtained studies to find other published studies. We selected only published studies to control the quality of the research designs on which our conclusions are based.

Forty empirical studies, dating from 1985 to 2006 conformed to the stated criteria. For comparison purposes, the results of each study are synthesized in the Appendix. Per study, we first describe the overall objective of the study. Next, we list the motives that were *explicitly* used in each study when setting up the hypotheses. To this end, we scrutinized the theoretical background section of each study and carefully listed the motives in the *exact terminology* of the authors discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the hypotheses.

## A self-motives perspective on feedback-seeking behavior

**Table 1.** Feedback-seeking motives categorized on the basis of the SCENT framework (Sedikides and Strube 1997)

Self-motives in social psychology (SCENT)	Commonly used category labels in OB	Feedback-seeking motives in OB (Original primary study labels)
Self-assessment	Instrumental motive (27)	Uncertainty reduction (18), Desire for feedback (4), Desire for useful information, Need for information, Obtaining information, Know how well you are doing, Sense-making
Self-improvement	Instrumental motive (21)	Performance enhancement (7), Goal achievement (4), Meeting personal goals (3), Goal-directed behaviour (2), Goal attainment (2), Competence development, Job mastery, Mastery achievement, Correct errors
Self-enhancement	Ego-based motive (14)	Desire to protect ego (4), Ego – defense (2), Protecting self (2), Self-esteem protection (2), Ego – inflicting motive, Coping with stress, Ego maintenance, Intrinsic motivation
	Image-based motive (36)	Impression Management (9), Face loss costs (8), Self-presentation (4), Self-image threat (2), Protecting public image (2), Self-concept threat (2), Defensive impression management (2), Offensive impression management, Negative image, Protective self-presentation, Desire to be responsive, Public social costs, Concern about personal relationships, Need for approval and self-affirmation
Self-verification	Not studied	Not studied

Note: Numbers between parentheses indicate the number of times a motive was explicitly mentioned in the selected review of studies (see Appendix).

In the next column, we also reported whether the study used a cost–value framework as additional theoretical underpinnings (see below). In the last column, we provided the nature of the zero-order correlation between the antecedents and the feedback-seeking behavior: a significant positive relationship (+), no significant relationship (ns) and a negative significant relationship (–). Studies included in the Appendix are marked by an asterisk in the Reference list.

### The Organizational Behavior Perspective: Motives of Feedback-Seeking Behavior

As reflected in recent reviews of the feedback-seeking literature (Ashford *et al.* 2003; Morrison 2002), agreement has been reached over the existence of three different motives driving feedback-seeking behavior, namely the instrumental, the ego-based and the image-based motive.

#### *Instrumental Motive*

A first motive that is prevalent in the feedback-seeking literature is the instrumental motive (also referred to as uncertainty reduction, goal attainment, goal achievement, desire for feedback and performance enhancement motive, as illustrated in the Table 1). Employees seek feedback because it has informational value that helps them meet their goals and regulate their behavior (Ashford 1986; Ashford and Tsui 1991). Evidence indicates that, as the perceived diagnostic value of feedback increases, individuals will seek it actively and more frequently (Ashford 1986; Morrison and Cummings 1992; Tuckey *et al.* 2002). Further support for the instrumental motive has been obtained mainly from research examining factors that are believed to bring the instrumental motive to the foreground. For instance, feedback has been argued to have particularly high instrumental value in uncertain situations; thus, employees will seek feedback more frequently

under these circumstances. As shown in the Appendix, a number of studies demonstrated that people seek feedback more frequently when they experience role uncertainty to reduce their feelings of uncertainty (Ashford and Black 1996; Ashford and Cummings 1985; Fedor *et al.* 1992). Similarly, for a person new to a job or organization, feedback information is particularly valuable to foster adaptation leading to higher levels of feedback-seeking in newcomers (Ashford 1986; Ashford and Cummings 1985; Brett *et al.* 1990; Callister *et al.* 1999; Gruman *et al.* 2006; Morrison 1993; Morrison *et al.* 2004) and a decline in feedback-seeking when these employees become more acclimated to their environment (Ashford and Cummings 1985; Callister *et al.* 1999).

Other factors can bring the instrumental motives to the forefront. One noteworthy individual difference variable that has been examined in this context is learning goal orientation (a focus on developing competence and mastering new situations). Employees with a learning goal orientation attach more value to feedback, as it is instrumental in improving their performance and, consequently, seek feedback more frequently (Madzar 2001; Tuckey *et al.* 2002; VandeWalle *et al.* 2000; VandeWalle and Cummings 1997). In addition, when employees are highly involved and have personal control in their jobs, they will seek more feedback (Ashford and Cummings 1983; Renn and Fedor 2001). Finally, it is important to note that the instrumental motive influences not only the frequency of feedback-seeking behavior, but also the sources from which employees seek feedback. The more credible the source, the higher the instrumental value of the feedback, and thus the more likely individuals are to seek feedback from this source (Fedor *et al.* 1992; Levy *et al.* 2002; Vancouver and Morrison 1995).

### *Ego-based Motive*

The information disclosed in a feedback message is not neutral to the feedback receiver; it often contains unfavorable information about unwanted behavior, disliked attitudes or

unsatisfying performance. As such, feedback might hurt employees' feelings of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, one of the basic hypotheses in feedback-seeking research is that employees will refrain from seeking feedback when the feedback is potentially threatening to the ego. A number of feedback-seeking studies in organizations have directly and indirectly examined this ego-based motive (also referred to as ego-defense, ego-inflicting, self-concept threat, self-esteem protection, ego protection motive, as shown in Table 1). For instance, Northcraft and Ashford (1990) found that individuals with low performance expectations sought less feedback after performing an experimental task than did those with high expectations, to avoid the drop in self-worth associated with negative feedback. Similarly, in a cross-sectional study, government employees reported less feedback-seeking behavior when they indicated that they were motivated by ego defense concerns (Tuckey *et al.* 2002). Similarly, individuals are also found to seek less feedback after receiving negative ratings in the feedback process (Abraham *et al.* 2006; Waldman and Atwater 2001).

A number of scholars also investigated individual difference variables that are assumed to influence the ego-based motive. For instance, it was hypothesized that the cost of feedback-seeking would be higher for someone with low self-efficacy because of the detrimental impact negative feedback might have on the feedback-seeker's ego. However, research revealed that this individual difference variable is not directly related to feedback-seeking behavior (Brown *et al.* 2001; Moon and Levy 2000; Renn and Fedor 2001). Instead, it seems to act as a moderator in the feedback-seeking process. For example, Moon and Levy (2000) demonstrated that the relationship between performance goal orientation and feedback-seeking behavior was negative for employees with high self-efficacy. They concluded that individuals with a low performance goal orientation and high self-efficacy frequently seek feedback because they have high confidence

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in their abilities and are more eager to use the feedback. Employees with a low performance goal orientation and low self-efficacy exhibited lower levels of feedback-seeking behavior.

Whereas self-efficacy refers to a context-specific assessment of competence to perform a specific task or a range of tasks in a given domain, self-esteem refers to a global cognitive appraisal of the self-concept. Similar to self-efficacy, researchers have argued that employees with high self-esteem are not afraid to receive unfavorable feedback (in contrast to individuals with low self-esteem) and thus will be more likely to seek it. Yet, research shows that the relationship between self-esteem and feedback-seeking behavior is not straightforward. For example, Ashford (1986), Morrison (1993), and Levy *et al.* (1995) found no significant relationship. Northcraft and Ashford (1990) reported that self-esteem was significantly related to feedback-seeking behavior about absolute performance levels. Yet, it was not related to feedback-seeking about comparative (relative to others) performance levels. Fedor *et al.* (1992) found a negative relationship between self-esteem and direct feedback-seeking (inquiry) but not between self-esteem and indirect feedback-seeking (monitoring). Finally, Vancouver and Morrison (1995) revealed that the relationship between self-esteem and feedback-seeking was moderated by the quality of the relation between the feedback source and the feedback-seeker.

### *Image-based Motive*

The third motive presumed to drive feedback-seeking behavior is the image-based motive to enhance and protect one's image in an organization (also referred to as self-presentation, face loss, defensive and offensive impression management, public image protection motive, as shown in Table 1). Employees do not work alone in organizations; they are surrounded by co-workers, supervisors, subordinates and even clients. In general, people are sensitive to the opinions others hold about them and want to maintain a favorable image to the public.

One of the basic assumptions in feedback-seeking research is that employees might think that seeking feedback will make them look bad. To avoid these 'face-loss' costs, they will refrain from seeking feedback in public.

In line with these arguments, research has demonstrated that the image-based motive is especially a motive for *not* seeking feedback. Research revealed that employees seek less feedback when feedback-seeking behavior takes place in public (Ashford and Northcraft 1992; Northcraft and Ashford 1990), when the situation is perceived as public (Levy *et al.* 1995; Williams *et al.* 1999), when feedback cannot be requested and/or provided via a computer (Ang and Cummings 1994; Ang *et al.* 1993; Kluger and Adler 1993), when stereotype threat is high (Roberson *et al.* 2003), and when other colleagues do not seek feedback (Ashford and Northcraft 1992; Williams *et al.* 1999). However, employees are found to seek more feedback in a supportive and considerate environment as this might lower the threat for one's public image (Brown *et al.* 2001; Brutus and Cabrera 2004; Lee *et al.* 2005; Levy *et al.* 2002; Madzar 2001; Vancouver and Morrison 1995).

Although the image-based motive is often the main motive for refraining from feedback-seeking, a few studies have also illustrated that impression-management concerns (conveying a favorable image to one's peers and/or supervisor) may also elicit feedback-seeking behavior. For instance, Moss *et al.* (2003) discovered that high-performing employees sought more positive feedback for impression management reasons.

### *Cost-Benefit Perceptions*

An important characteristic of the feedback-seeking process is that the above-mentioned motives do not directly influence feedback-seeking behavior. Instead, Ashford and Cummings (1983) proposed that, on the basis of the activation of each of the motives, employees make a conscious assessment of the costs and values that are associated with

feedback-seeking. In turn, this cost–value analysis is the primary determinant of subsequent feedback-seeking behavior. As an example, imagine the benefits and values of seeking feedback for a newcomer in an organization. On the one hand, as he/she is in a completely new environment, he/she might be motivated to seek feedback for reducing uncertainty. On the other hand, he/she does not want to convey a negative image to new colleagues, and thus the image-based motive of feedback-seeking is also activated. Thus, whether this employee will actually be seeking feedback depends on the results of a cost–value analysis: do the values associated with feedback-seeking (uncertainty reduction) outweigh the costs of feedback-seeking (negative image)? This intermediate mechanism is well reflected in feedback-seeking research in the organizational behavior literature. As shown in the Appendix, the majority of the empirical studies (22 out of 40) used not only the motives as theoretical underpinnings, but also referred to this cost–value analysis as an active regulating process for feedback-seekers. Four studies also directly measured these value and cost perceptions and found direct empirical support for this framework. For instance, VandeWalle *et al.* (2000) showed that people with a high learning goal orientation (and thus, a stronger instrumental motive) perceived more value in feedback, which in turn led to more frequent feedback-seeking. When supervisors exhibited high subordinate consideration (and thus, downplayed the image-based motive), employees reported fewer costs associated with feedback-seeking, which in turn also led to more frequent feedback-seeking.

In sum, research in organizational behavior has provided evidence for the existence of three different motives driving feedback-seeking behavior, namely the instrumental motive, the ego-based motive and the image-based motive. Each of these motives is hypothesized to influence the values and cost associated with feedback-seeking, which in turn influences the actual frequency of employee feedback-seeking (for a more detailed overview, see Ashford

*et al.* 2003). Although several researchers have stressed the importance of different feedback-seeking motives in understanding and encouraging feedback-seeking behavior, very few studies have examined the interplay between the different motives. Little is known about how these motives work in concert. A notable exception is a study by Levy *et al.* (1995). These researchers looked at how instrumental, ego-based and image-based motives play out over time and concluded that instrumental motives instigate employees to seek feedback, but that concerns about self-image may lead employees to reconsider and modify those intentions.

### **The Social Psychology Perspective: Motives of the Self**

Since its origins, research on self-motives underlying information processing has occupied a central position in social and personality psychology. The roots of self-motives research in social psychology go back to the early writings of Gordon Allport (1937), Charles Cooley (1902), Leon Festinger (1957), William James (1890) and Prescott Lecky (1945). The interest in self-motives in social psychology stems from the central importance of the self to nearly all other phenomena studied by social and personality psychologists. The self is the central point of reference for social cognition, emotion, motivation and social behavior.

Research on self-motives in social psychology is based on one fundamental assumption. The way people select, process, remember and react to information about themselves is motivated (Banaji and Prentice 1994; Sedikides and Gregg 2003; Sedikides and Strube 1997). Motives have been proposed to color the ways in which people seek self-relevant information, appraise its sources, interpret its veracity and intend to change their behavior. In this paper, we chose to use the SCENT model from Sedikides and Strube (1997), although we acknowledge that other taxonomies exist (e.g. Deci and Ryan 2000; Epstein and Morling 1995; Leary 2007). We opted for the SCENT model for two reasons. First, it has successfully



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integrated various apparently conflicting research streams in social psychology. Second, it shows strong parallels and can be easily applied to the motives perspective adopted in the feedback-seeking domain. The SCENT model integrates four different theoretical models that have been traditionally distinguished in social psychology, each with a different view on the dominant self-motive behind information processing.

According to the self-verification perspective, people are motivated to maintain consistency between their self-conceptions and new self-relevant information. They want others to see them as they see themselves (Lecky 1945). Therefore, people will solicit information that confirms their existing self-views (e.g. Swann 1987; Swann *et al.* 2002). According to the self-enhancement perspective, people are motivated to improve the favorability of their self-conceptions and to protect their self-concepts from negative information. For instance, people process positive self-relevant information faster than negative self-relevant information and spend more time reading favorable information (e.g. Sedikides *et al.* 2002, 2003). The third perspective, the self-assessment perspective, proposes that people are motivated to obtain a consensually accurate evaluation of the self. To accomplish this objective, people are interested predominantly in the diagnosticity of self-relevant information, that is, the extent to which that information can reduce uncertainty about an aspect of the self. Thus, people seek diagnostic information, regardless of its positive or negative implications for the self and regardless whether the information affirms or challenges existing self-conceptions. For instance, people rate high diagnostic tasks as more attractive than low diagnostic tasks (e.g. Trope 1980; Trope and Pomeranz 1998). According to the fourth and last perspective, self-improvement, people are motivated to improve their traits, abilities and skills. For instance, cancer patients have been found to make upward comparisons when choosing interaction partners among other cancer victims. The upward comparison in choice of contacts is interpreted as an attempt on the part of these

patients to learn how to cope successfully with their disease (Molleman *et al.* 1986). This motive is conceptually different from the other three motives (Taylor *et al.* 1995; Wayment and Taylor 1995). Whereas self-enhancement is concerned with maximizing the positivity of the self-concept, self-improvement focuses on genuine improvement. Whereas self-verification is concerned with maintaining consistency between old and new self-relevant information, self-improvement focuses on self-concept change. Finally, whereas self-assessment is concerned with increasing the accuracy of self-knowledge, self-improvement focuses on self-concept betterment regardless of self-concept accuracy.

Initially, a debate existed between adherents of the various motivational perspectives. Proponents of each theoretical model questioned the existence and dominance of the other motives and tried to persuade the opposition through ample empirical evidence (for a review, see Shrauger 1975). However, in recent years the existence and importance of each of these motives in guiding behavior and information processing is no longer questioned (Banaji and Prentice 1994; Sedikides and Strube 1995). Sedikides and Strube (1997) proposed that self-motives research should go beyond the basic question of whether each of the motives exists and should start examining how the various theoretical models can be reconciled, thus addressing the broader question of how the various self-motives work in concert (Sedikides and Strube 1997). In their SCENT model, the authors propose an organizing framework delineating the situational and individual differences conditions that might moderate the activation and expression of the self-motives in self-evaluation processes. This theoretical framework has already received some empirical support. A first series of studies has demonstrated that individual difference variables moderate the emergence and interplay of the four motives (Bayer and Gollwitzer 2005; Freitas *et al.* 2001). For instance, Roney and Sorrentino (1995) showed that uncertainty-oriented persons are more likely to be guided

in their self-evaluation by self-assessment strivings, whereas certainty-oriented persons are more likely to be guided by self-verification strivings. Looking at situational moderators, a second group of studies has tried to answer the question ‘under which circumstances do the motives operate?’ (Sanitioso and Wlodarski 2004; Trope *et al.* 2003). For instance, accountability has been found to moderate the self-enhancement motive. When people expect that they have to explain, justify and defend their self-evaluations to another person, self-evaluations tend to be lower (Sedikides *et al.* 2002). Finally, a third category of studies has shown that different motives might be activated simultaneously and are very likely to interact with each other (Neiss *et al.* 2006; Sedikides 1993; Swann *et al.* 1989). For instance, Katz and Beach (2000) found that individuals were most attracted to romantic partners who provided both self-verification and self-enhancement, and were less attracted to partners who provided either self-verification alone or self-enhancement alone.

In short, the SCENT model on self-motives in social psychology proposes that processes such as feedback-seeking are colored by four different motives: self-assessment, self-

improvement, self-enhancement and self-verification. It is assumed that these motives are dynamically interrelated; they do not usually operate independently. The key to explaining self-evaluation processes is an enhanced understanding of the specific situational and individual difference variables that regulate the activation and the dynamic interplay of the four motives. Similarly, we propose that an enhanced understanding of the self-motives (both situationally and dispositionally based) of the SCENT model might serve as a key to a better comprehension of feedback-seeking behavior.

## Conceptual Comparison and Integration of the Motivational Perspectives

### *Similarities*

A number of similarities exist between the two perspectives (see upper part of Table 2). Therefore, we argue that an integration of the two perspectives is feasible and desirable. First, both perspectives assume that individuals’ evaluative behavior is driven by motivational strivings and that, better to comprehend and encourage evaluative behavior, a better understanding of the underlying motives is required.

**Table 2.** Summary of conceptual similarities and differences between the feedback-seeking motives and self-motives

Similarities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individuals’ evaluative behavior is driven by motivational strivings. The key to better comprehend and encourage evaluative behavior is the study of underlying motives.</li> <li>2. People are motivated to reduce uncertainty, achieve goals, and feel good about themselves.</li> <li>3. Motives are activated during the evaluative process by different individual differences variables and situational variables.</li> <li>4. The activation of underlying motives is inferred from observing the effects of antecedent variables on evaluative (feedback-seeking) behavior.</li> <li>5. The influence of motives on evaluative behavior (feedback-seeking) is controlled by individuals through actively evaluating the cost and values associated with obtaining evaluative information.</li> </ol>
Differences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Uncertainty reduction is believed to be the dominant motive in feedback-seeking, whereas the self-motives perspective assumes that all motives serve self-enhancement ends.</li> <li>2. The number, names, and nature of the motives in social psychology do not fully correspond to the motives underlying feedback-seeking.</li> <li>3. Feedback-seeking motives are generally studied in isolation. Self-motives are studied in concert and their interplay is assumed to be regulated by individual and situational variables.</li> <li>4. Feedback-seeking motives are generally inferred from the global frequency of feedback-seeking. Self-motives are generally inferred from feedback-seeking about specific self-views.</li> </ol>

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Second, as feedback-seeking behavior has its roots in social psychology (Ashford and Cummings 1983), it is not surprising to see strong parallels between the nature of the motives identified. For instance, the instrumental motive in management research resembles the self-assessment and the self-improvement motives in social psychology, as this motive is concerned with reducing uncertainty and attaining valued end states. The ego-based and image-based motives in management research correspond to the self-enhancement motive in social psychology as both motives are in the end concerned with feeling good about the self.

Third, both perspectives delineate that motives can be activated by different individual difference variables and situational variables. For instance, in management research, learning goal orientation is assumed to make the instrumental motive more salient, whereas a public context is assumed to make the image-based motive more salient. Similarly, in social psychology, high confidence in self-views is assumed to activate a self-verification motive, whereas a context that holds individuals highly accountable leads to higher self-assessment.

Fourth, in both perspectives, the dominant research approach for examining underlying motives consisted of examining the influence of antecedents on evaluative (feedback-seeking) behavior. If the presence of a proposed antecedent leads to an increase or decrease in feedback-seeking frequency, it is concluded that the antecedent influences the hypothesized motive. Very few studies have actually tried to measure the motives underlying evaluative behavior (for an exception, see Tuckey *et al.* (2002) in organizational behavior, and Helgeson and Mickelson (1995) in social psychology).

Fifth, the cost-value framework has emerged as the dominant framework in the organizational behavior literature explaining the effect of motives on actual feedback-seeking behavior. Employees act as active agents consciously evaluating the cost and values associated with feedback-seeking (Ashford 1986; VandeWalle and Cummings 1997). While not explicitly mentioned in the original SCENT model,

several studies in the self-motives domain have used exactly the same cost-value perspective, suggesting that the influence of self-motives on evaluative behavior is controlled by individuals through actively evaluating the cost and values associated with obtaining evaluative information (e.g. Battmann 1988; Trope 1986; Trope *et al.* 2003; Trope and Neter 1994).

### *Differences*

A number of differences between the two perspectives are noteworthy (see lower part of Table 2). First, the number, names and nature of the motives in social psychology do not correspond to the motives underlying feedback-seeking. Feedback-seeking research has virtually neglected the role of the self-verification motive. Furthermore, as clearly illustrated in the Appendix, several different names have been used to refer to the same feedback-seeking motives (e.g. ego-protection, ego defense, image-based motive, image defense and enhancement, defensive impression management, offensive impression management, uncertainty reduction, etc.). In addition, the proposed motives do not fully correspond to the self-motives. On the one hand, according to the social psychological literature, the instrumental motive in organizational behavior falls apart in a self-assessment motive (aimed at reducing uncertainty) and a self-improvement motive (aimed at attaining a desired goal) as these motives might have different antecedents (Sedikides and Strube 1997; Sedikides 1999). On the other hand, the ego-based and the image-based motive might be two different manifestations of one self-enhancement motive, as suggested by the SCENT model (Sedikides and Strube 1997).

A second major difference is the way in which scholars believe the different motives are interrelated. Although theoretical work in the management domain has not been very explicit about possible interrelations between the various motives, it is generally emphasized that the instrumental motive is the dominant motive in feedback-seeking behavior. This is reflected in the following statement by Morrison

(1995, 352): 'In fact (various works) are best understood as reflecting the important informational role that feedback has in reducing uncertainty and helping people to achieve goals. This is the dominant motive behind feedback-seeking behavior.' Similarly, Ashford (1985, 68) stated: 'If one were completely certain about all potential evaluations of those behaviors, it is unlikely that feedback would be perceived as valuable. In such situations, individuals would have no motive to seek feedback.' Although most scholars have remained silent concerning this issue, on the basis of these statements one would be inclined to assume that the other two motives are seen as inhibitors or modifiers of the instrumental motive. Thus, whereas employees are initially inclined to seek feedback for instrumental motives, they may refrain from seeking feedback or change their feedback-seeking strategy because different individual or situational variables have activated the ego-based or image-based motive (see Levy *et al.* 1995, for an empirical demonstration). In contrast, the SCENT model proposes a hierarchical structure, wherein the self-verification, self-assessment and self-improvement motives ultimately serve self-enhancement ends. In this hierarchical perspective, the individual is motivated to achieve outcomes that will lead to a most positive self-concept, but the individual does not necessarily attempt to achieve this objective through brute self-aggrandization (Sedikides and Strube 1997). Self-enhancement concerns can be carried out either directly through flagrant attempts to increase self-concept positivity (candid self-enhancement) or, perhaps most often, indirectly through attempts to self-verify, self-assess, or self-improve (called tactical).

Third, the self-motives perspective differs to some extent from the feedback-seeking perspective regarding the role of various individual and situational variables. In management research, most studies have focused on feedback-seeking motives in isolation. Consequently, one variable is typically hypothesized to influence one feedback-seeking

motive. For instance, research examining learning goal orientation as an antecedent of feedback-seeking behavior, supports the activation of an instrumental motive in the feedback-seeking process (VandeWalle and Cummings 1997). The presence of a public context as an inhibitor of feedback-seeking behavior supports the activation of an image-based motive (Williams *et al.* 1999). Little attention has been paid to the possible impact of these variables on other feedback-seeking motives. How does a learning goal orientation influence the image-based motive? How does a public context influence the instrumental motive? In contrast, one of the basic assumptions of the SCENT model in social psychology is that self-motives work in concert and that their activation is regulated by situational and individual difference variables.

Self-motives research in social psychology has typically designed experiments to pit two or more motives against each other to elucidate how the interplay of different motives is determined. For instance, in one study a direct attempt was made to compare the relative strength of various motives (excluding self-improvement) in a self-reflection task (Sedikides 1993). Participants chose the question they would be most likely to ask themselves in order to determine whether or not they possessed a particular type of personality trait. Questions varied in terms of the valence (positive/negative), diagnosticity (high/low) and importance (central/peripheral) of the answers they elicited. Participants' yes/no answers to the questions were also noted. Generally, participants self-enhanced more than they self-assessed or self-verified. That is, they chose higher diagnosticity questions concerning central positive traits than central negative ones, and answered 'yes' more often to central positive questions than central negative questions. However, participants also self-verified more than they self-assessed, in that they chose more questions concerning (relatively certain) central traits than (relatively uncertain) peripheral traits.

A fourth noteworthy difference is that management research has often considered

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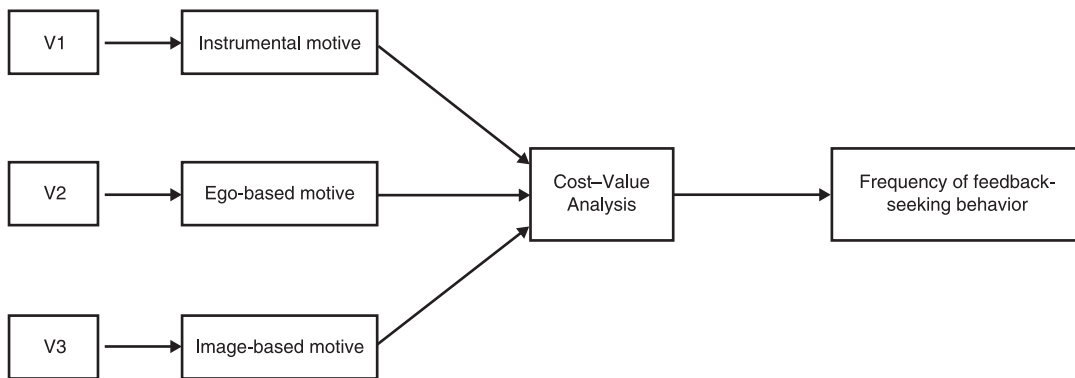


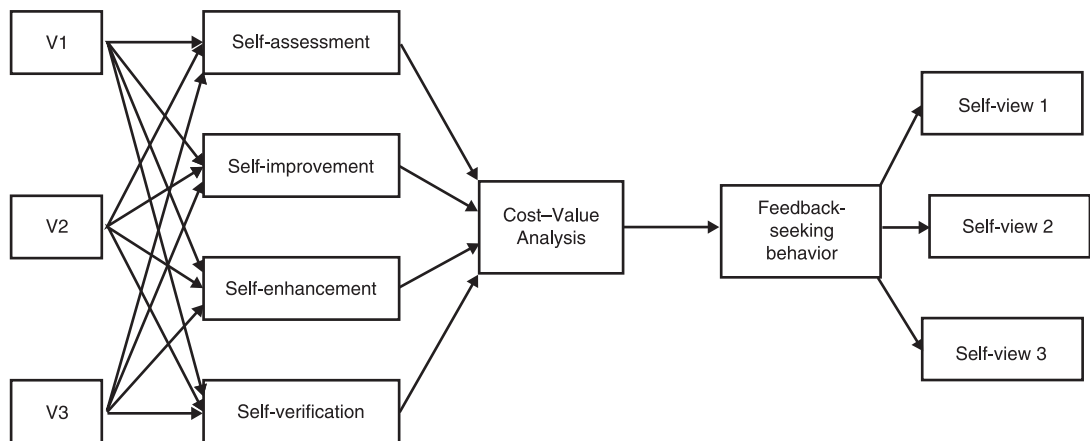
Figure 1. Simplified model of feedback-seeking studies in organizational behavior.

feedback-seeking as a unidimensional activity; that is, employees decide to seek feedback or not to seek feedback. Consequently, support for the activation of one of the feedback-seeking motives is in most studies inferred from an increase or decrease in the frequency of feedback-seeking (for exceptions, see Morrison 1993; Vancouver and Morrison 1995). Self-motives research has differentiated global feedback-seeking into feedback-seeking about specific self-views. This approach has been very fruitful in identifying self-motives, as it appears that individuals may satisfy different motives by seeking feedback about different self-views. For instance, most people indicate that they prefer feedback pertaining to their positive rather than negative self-views supporting self-enhancement theory. Consistent with self-verification theory, however, people who seek favorable feedback pertaining to their positive self-conceptions, seek unfavorable feedback pertaining to their negative self-views (Swann *et al.* 1989). This line of self-motives research is based on a ‘specificity matching’ principle, which holds that the specificity of predictors and criteria should be matched in order to obtain higher predictive validity. Thus, according to this principle, if one wants to predict feedback-seeking on the basis of uncertainty, one should examine uncertainty associated with a specific self-view in relation to feedback-

seeking about the same specific self-view (for a detailed discussion, see Swann *et al.* 2007).

### Integration

Figure 1 shows a simplified version of the model that typically represents empirical feedback-seeking studies in the organizational behavior domain. A number of individual and situational variables (V1, V2, V3, etc.) are related to one of the three motives. These motives affect the cost–value analysis conducted by the feedback-seeker, which in turn is related to the actual frequency of feedback-seeking behavior. Figure 2 displays an integration of the feedback-seeking motives into the self-motives framework. This figure offers a heuristic model of what feedback-seeking research might look like when enriched with key concepts of the SCENT model. Social psychological research suggests that the extensive nomenclature used in feedback-seeking research might be simplified and that self-motives fall into four broad overarching categories: self-assessment, self-improvement, self-verification and self-enhancement. Thus, the SCENT model might present not only a more comprehensive and parsimonious account of feedback-seeking motives than the current perspective; Additionally, in the long run it might also lead to a standard ‘big four’ vocabulary of self-motives



**Figure 2.** Towards an integrated model of self-motives and feedback-seeking research.

that is folded into the feedback-seeking literature and other work-related domains. This is also illustrated in Table 1, where we mapped the different labels of feedback-seeking motives that have been used in feedback-seeking research onto the self-motives of the SCENT model.

Next, instead of a one-on-one relationship, individual and situational antecedents (V1, V2, V3, etc.) were linked to all motives in Figure 2 to indicate that these variables regulate the activation and inhibition of all four motives (e.g. Neiss *et al.* 2006). Finally, in Figure 2, we point out that the self-motives affect not only the frequency of feedback-seeking but also determine the self-views about which individuals are likely to seek feedback. Recent research in social psychology indicates that the role of specific self-views in determining feedback-seeking generalizes to highly contextualized self-views (e.g. ‘in my relationship to my supervisor, I tend to be very patient’) (Chen *et al.* 2006a), making the application of such self-views to feedback-seeking research in organizations particularly interesting.

We believe that an integration of the two motivational perspectives as depicted in Figure 2 offers a more accurate and broader conceptual framework for the study of feedback-seeking in organizations and might be particularly useful in guiding future research. The remainder

delineates a number of domains for applying insights from self-motives research to management research. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive but should give an idea of the potentially substantial contributions of the self-motives framework to organizational behavior research.

### **Applications of the Self-Motives Model to Feedback-Seeking Research**

#### *Identifying New Antecedents of Feedback-seeking Behavior*

A first benefit of considering the underlying motives is that we can identify several new individual and situational antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior and link them directly to specific motives based on the social psychological literature. For example, evidence suggests that people high in uncertainty orientation, people with a high desire for self-appraisal, Type A individuals, people high in need for cognition, and individuals high in need for closure are more prone to self-assessment concerns as opposed to self-verification concerns (Sedikides and Strube 1997). Future feedback-seeking research in organizational behavior might benefit from examining these individual antecedents.

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Similarly, feedback-seeking studies should examine the following contextual variables, as they have been linked to different self-motives: individual accountability, consequentiality of outcomes, individualistic/collectivistic cultures (self-assessment vs self-enhancement), temporal orientation (self-assessment vs self-improvement), controlling environment (self-enhancement vs self-improvement), group identification, time for introspection (self-verification vs self-enhancement), and a non-verifying evaluator (self-verification vs self-assessment) (Sedikides and Strube 1997). None of these practically and theoretically interesting antecedents has been linked to feedback-seeking behavior in organizations, while they may offer valuable directions for future research.

### *Resolving Inconsistencies in the Feedback-seeking Literature*

A second benefit of using self-motives is that they may help explain some surprising and equivocal findings in previous feedback-seeking research. As previously noted, the relationship between self-esteem and feedback-seeking has been found to be rather inconsistent. Recently, a study in the self-motives domain has shed new light on this troubling issue. In three experimental studies, Bernichon *et al.* (2003) differentiated participants' global self-esteem from their specific self-view of social competence. They found that high self-esteem participants sought self-verifying feedback, even if it was negative, but low self-esteem participants sought positive feedback, even if it was non-self-verifying. So, to understand the relationship between self-esteem and feedback-seeking, one has to take into account the role of specific self-views and how they interact with global measures of self-esteem.

As another example, a close inspection of the feedback-seeking literature reveals a couple of findings that are inconsistent with the instrumental motive. In fact, several studies reported significant negative correlations between uncertainty and feedback-seeking (Ashford 1986; Fedor *et al.* 1992; Gupta *et al.* 1999),

indicating that high levels of uncertainty lead to less feedback-seeking. These findings might represent the activation of a self-verification motive in the feedback-seeking process. Social psychology studies have shown that the more certain individuals are of a particular self-view, the more they go out of their way to confirm and sustain this self-view (Chen *et al.* 2004, 2006b; Pelham and Swann 1994). Thus, it is possible that people experiencing high levels of certainty seek feedback to obtain self-verifying feedback (Anseel and Lievens, 2007b). Future research might illuminate these inconsistencies by explicitly taking the role of different self-motives into account.

### *Understanding the Interplay Between Feedback-seeking Motives*

Little is known about how employees deal with seemingly conflicting motives in feedback-seeking behavior in organizations. On the basis of the self-motives framework, various research avenues concerning the interplay among feedback-seeking motives might be pursued. Several situational and individual moderators should be examined in order to scrutinize which feedback-seeking motives become more salient under specific conditions. That is, depending on the specific feedback situation in an organization, employee feedback-seeking might be driven by different motives. For instance, feedback-seeking in performance appraisal and 360 degree feedback might be primarily driven by self-enhancement strivings, whereas informal feedback conversations and career development discussions might be predominantly driven by self-assessment and self-improvement strivings. Similarly, while all four motives might be activated in one person, individuals may turn to specific sources for feedback that satisfies each of the motives (Neiss *et al.* 2006). It might be, for instance, that employees turn to their colleagues for self-verifying feedback, to their supervisors for self-enhancing feedback, and to a mentor for self-improvement feedback.

Furthermore, different kinds of feedback decisions should be examined as social psychology research suggests that people try to reconcile conflicting motives by seeking feedback about different self-views (Swann *et al.* 1989). In addition, future research might also examine motives that have previously been linked to one feedback-seeking motive (e.g. public context and image-based motives, learning goal orientation and instrumental motives, and uncertainty and instrumental motives) and how they relate to the other self-motives of the SCENT model. We know of one recent study in the management domain that has started to examine feedback-seeking behavior from this point of view. In a survey conducted among 170 medical residents of a Dutch university hospital, Janssen and Prins (in press) found that a learning-approach goal orientation was positively related to seeking self-improvement information and negatively related to seeking of self-enhancement information. In contrast, a performance-approach goal orientation was negatively associated with seeking of self-improvement information, while a performance-avoidance goal orientation was positively associated with seeking of self-enhancement information. We need more of such studies.

### *Integrating Feedback-seeking and Feedback Reactions Research*

Recently, the feedback-seeking literature has been criticized because it has tended to study feedback-seeking behavior in isolation from feedback interventions in general (Nowakowski and Kozlowski 2005). The SCENT model might offer a theoretical framework for integrating these research streams, as findings in social psychology indicate that the same self-motives that influence feedback-seeking are crucial in determining feedback reactions. Feedback reactions are of particular interest for management researchers and practitioners, as these reactions play a key role in the feedback process. Feedback acceptance has been found to serve as a central mediator for performance improvement (Ilgen *et al.* 1979; Kinicki *et al.*

2004). As a consequence, feedback reactions have been studied in assessment and development centers (Jones and Whitmore 1995), 360-degree feedback (Bono and Colbert 2005), management development programs (Ryan *et al.* 2000), computer testing (Tonidandel *et al.* 2002), performance appraisal (Cawley *et al.* 1999) and selection decisions (Bauer *et al.* 1998).

Given the widespread study of feedback reactions, it is remarkable that no attention has been paid to feedback reactions in the context of the feedback-seeking process. Self-motives research suggests that cognitive reactions to self-relevant feedback are guided by the self-verification motive. People are more likely to accept feedback when the feedback message confirms their self-views (Anseel and Lievens 2006; Swann *et al.* 1987). Affective reactions to self-relevant feedback have been found to be in line with predictions of self-enhancement theory. Individuals are more satisfied with favorable feedback compared with unfavorable feedback (Jussim *et al.* 1995; Sweeney and Wells 1990). The integration of feedback-seeking and feedback reactions research on the basis of the self-motives framework raises several fascinating questions for future research: Do motives that have been activated at the feedback-seeking stage continue to have an influence at the feedback reactions stage of the feedback process? Do the same variables that activate motives in the feedback-seeking stage activate motives at the reactions stage of the feedback process. How can self-motives be regulated to instigate higher acceptance of performance feedback? Insight into these questions might offer valuable information for developing specific strategies for increasing feedback acceptance. Recent feedback research has started focusing on organizational strategies for developing favorable feedback environments that stimulate feedback openness among employees (e.g. Anseel and Lievens 2007a; Levy and Williams 2004; Steelman *et al.* 2004). The current self-motives conceptualization of the feedback-seeking process might contribute to the development of strong feedback environments in



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organizations. These environments are characterized by managers and employees feeling comfortable when seeking, providing and receiving feedback for encouraging development. We are convinced that future research focused on identifying situational variables that may activate especially self-assessment and self-improvement motives when seeking and reacting to feedback will be helpful in creating a feedback culture in organizations.

### *Examining Attitudinal Outcomes of Feedback-seeking Motives*

Very few studies in the feedback-seeking domain have examined attitudinal outcomes of feedback-seeking in organizations. As an exception, Ashford (1988) examined whether feedback-seeking was an effective strategy for coping with stress during organizational changes. Results showed that active attempts to obtain information and feedback either failed to affect or actually increased stress levels. One reason for these unexpected findings is that Ashford did not take into account which type of feedback employees sought. Whether the feedback is positive or negative, process or outcome oriented, self-verifying or disconfirming will determine the attitudinal outcome of the feedback-seeking attempts.

The self-motives framework in social psychology might provide a framework for understanding these effects and might offer some directions for examining attitudinal outcomes of feedback-seeking. For instance, recent work by Swann *et al.* (2002) showed that people who use self-verifying information-seeking strategies demonstrated higher levels of psychological and physical health because self-verifying feedback increases employees, feelings of control and stability in their social environments. Similarly, considerable research evidence suggests that self-enhancement tendencies such as overly positive self-evaluations, exaggerated perceptions of control or mastery and unrealistic optimism appear to promote mental health, including the ability to care about others, the ability to be happy or contented,

and the ability to engage in productive and creative work (Taylor and Brown 1988). More recent self-motives research suggests that these self-enhancement strivings may be especially adaptive in the short run, but may lead to lower levels of self-esteem and well-being in the long run (Robins and Beer 2001). Thus, a worthwhile avenue would be to investigate whether feedback-seeking driven by self-verification and self-enhancement motives is a useful strategy for employees to increase their wellbeing.

### *Enhancing the Feedback-Performance Relationship*

As a final application, the self-motives' framework might provide some new insights into the complex relationship between feedback interventions and performance. A meta-analytic review of the feedback literature revealed that feedback interventions do not produce unequivocal positive effects on performance (Kluger and DeNisi 1996). According to Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) feedback intervention theory, the effectiveness of any feedback intervention depends on where the feedback intervention focuses its attention. When attention is focused on the task (e.g. tasks on which the person needs to improve), individuals focus on shrinking the gap between their actual performance and their performance goals. Alternatively, when feedback focuses attention on the self (e.g. how a person views his/her self image or concept), feedback interventions often produce strong affective reactions that can interfere with task performance.

The SCENT model might offer a framework for studying the effects of feedback interventions. When individuals seek feedback for self-assessment and self-improvement, they are motivated to assess accurately and improve their performance. This is hypothesized to lead to an increase in performance. However, when employees seek feedback for self-verification and self-enhancement purposes, feedback-seeking may divert attention away from the task to questions of who we really are, resulting in a decrease in performance (Kluger and

DeNisi 1996). Thus, it seems crucial to map the self-motives that drive employees' behavior in feedback situations, as they might determine whether employees choose to focus on feedback for task improvement or feedback that reinforces and enhances their self-views.

### *Limitations*

In the present paper, we aimed to integrate the current perspective on feedback-seeking motives in organizational behavior with recent developments in self-motives research in social psychology. However, caution is warranted when drawing definite conclusions about this integration as both research domains are quickly evolving. First, although the majority of scholars in social psychology currently acknowledge that there are four dominant self-motives (Neiss *et al.* 2006; Sedikides and Gregg 2003), some scholars have proposed a different taxonomy. For instance, Leary (2007) recently proposed a taxonomy with only three self-motives, namely self-enhancement, self-verification and self-expansion. This again illustrates that self-motives research is a very active domain with knowledge quickly advancing. We believe it is up to future research in management and social psychology to yield empirical resolutions to the self-motives debate. The current integration might be useful in guiding research that should ultimately address the structure of self-motives.

Second, in our integrated model (Figure 2), we do not make assumptions about the dominance of one motive over another. Although the SCENT model argues for the dominance of self-enhancement in the long term, this might be different for feedback-seeking in an organizational context wherein performance improvement might be more emphasized. Given that this issue is also heavily debated in social psychology, we believe it is up to future empirical research to examine which motive is dominant in the long-term and whether there is indeed a dominant motive (for a detailed debate of this issue, see Sedikides and Gregg 2003; Swann *et al.* 2002).

Third, in the review, we focused on the SCENT model for enriching feedback-seeking research in organizational behavior, given its parallels with the feedback-seeking literature and its success in integrating various research streams. However, we acknowledge there are a number of other motivational theories in social and educational psychology that might also be able to shed new light on feedback research in organizations. For instance, we are convinced that key concepts of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000), implicit person theory (Dweck 1999) and regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997) might be helpful in increasing our understanding of feedback processes. However, a detailed treatment of these theories is beyond the scope of the current paper.

### **Conclusion**

Nearly 25 years ago, Ashford and Cummings (1983) built on social psychological research on self-motives to introduce the concept of employee feedback-seeking behavior in organizations. Since this seminal paper, the study of feedback-seeking behavior has been considerably advanced and has yielded important knowledge for researchers and practitioners. However, during this period, the social psychological study of self-motives has also advanced significantly. Until now, a number of new insights from this research domain have been overlooked, or simply neglected in feedback-seeking research. We believe this review provides an important contribution in tracing feedback-seeking back to its roots, thereby identifying possible gaps in current feedback-seeking theory.

Along these lines, we outlined several key components of self-motives research and their application within the feedback literature. While acknowledging the importance of previous research, we attempted to shed light on the conceptual discrepancies and outlined paths for future research. We are excited about the potential to integrate the self-motives literature with what we know about feedback-seeking. We believe that feedback-seeking in organizations

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can be much better understood, much better predicted and more easily encouraged as a result of such an integration. Theories and constructs in social psychology have traditionally been used to expand knowledge and understanding in organizational behavior. We think that feedback-seeking in organizations is a very important potential area for such a marriage and that the time is right to begin this integration, because the knowledge in the self-motives area has been growing at such a rapid pace for the past 15 years.

### Note

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**Appendix. Summary of studies which investigated motives of feedback-seeking behavior in organizations**

Author	Study focus	Guiding motives	Cost/value model	Antecedents
1. Abraham <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Feedback-seeking behavior in assessment centers.	Self-image threat	Indirect	Performance (+); interpersonal skills (+); communication skills (+)
2. Ang <i>et al.</i> (1993)	Effect of information technology and mood of the feedback giver on feedback-seeking behavior.	Face loss costs Defensive impression management	Indirect	Computer environment (+); mood feedback giver (+)
3. Ang and Cummings (1994)	Effect of preceding feedback and information technology on feedback-seeking behavior.	Ego-inflicting Negative image	No	Feedback sign (+); computer environment (+)
4. Ashford (1986)	Effect of individual and organizational determinants on feedback-seeking behavior.	Uncertainty reduction Goal attainment Self-presentation Ego-defense Face loss	Direct	Importance of goal attainment (+); uncertainty (-); organizational tenure (-); job tenure (-); negative goal beliefs (+); self-confidence (ns); effort in seeking (-); risk in seeking (-); received feedback (+); value of feedback (+)
5. Ashford and Black (1996)	Proactivity during organizational entry.	Uncertainty reduction	No	Desire for control (ns)
6. Ashford and Cummings (1985)	Effect of individual and organizational determinants on feedback-seeking behavior.	Uncertainty reduction Goal achievement	No	Role ambiguity (+); contingency uncertainty (+); organizational tenure (-); job involvement (+); tolerance for ambiguity (-)
7. Ashford and Northcraft (1992)	Influence of public on feedback-seeking behavior.	Protective self-presentation Impression management	Indirect	Context (+); norms (+); nervousness during feedback-seeking behavior (-); task anxiety (ns)
8. Bennet and Herold (1990)	Effects of tolerance for ambiguity on feedback-seeking behavior.	Uncertainty reduction	No	General tolerance for ambiguity (ns); job-related tolerance for ambiguity (+)
9. Brett <i>et al.</i> (1990)	Feedback-seeking behavior of new hires and job changers.	Coping with stress Self-presentation	No	Adjustment newcomers (+); adaptation job changers (-)
10. Brown <i>et al.</i> (2001)	Contribution of information-seeking and self-efficacy to self-regulation processes.	Uncertainty reduction Impression management	Indirect	Supervisor feedback (+); supervisor consideration (+); initiation structure (+); self-generated feedback (ns); job tenure (-); self-efficacy (ns)
11. Brutus and Cabrera (2004)	Effect of cultural values on feedback-seeking behavior.	Meeting personal goals Face-loss costs Desire to be responsive to environment	Indirect	Age (ns); gender (ns); experience (ns); ability (-); feedback cost (ns); conformity (+); tradition (+); benevolence (+); universalism (ns); self-direction (ns); stimulation (ns); hedonism (ns); achievement (ns); power (+); security (+); feedback clarity (+)
12. Callister <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Changes in feedback-seeking behavior after career transitions.	Uncertainty reduction Impression management	Indirect	Time (-); role clarity (-)



## Appendix (continued)

Author	Study focus	Guiding motives	Cost/value model	Antecedents
13. Fedor <i>et al.</i> (1992)	Effect of individual and situational antecedents on feedback-seeking behavior.	Need for information Uncertainty reduction Impression management Self-image threat	Direct	T1: Feedback uncertainty (-); feedback costs (-); source credibility (+); tolerance for ambiguity (-); external feedback propensity (+); self-esteem (ns) T2: Feedback uncertainty (ns); feedback costs (-); source credibility (ns); tolerance for ambiguity (-); external feedback propensity (+); self-esteem (-)
14. Gruman <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Socialization tactics during organizational entry.	Uncertainty reduction Goal-directed behavior	No	Self-efficacy (+); organizational socialization tactics (+)
15. Gupta <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Feedback-seeking behavior of managers in multinationals.	Uncertainty reduction Goal achievement Face loss costs	Indirect	Organizational strategy (ns); culture distance (ns); role conflict (+); role ambiguity (ns); centralization (ns); lateral mechanisms (+); communication headquarters (ns); socialization mechanisms (ns); nationality (ns); age (-); job tenure (ns)
16. Klich and Feldman (1992)	Effect of approval and appraisal needs on feedback-seeking behavior.	Performance enhancement Self-esteem protection Face loss costs	Indirect	Need for approval (+); need for achievement (+)
17. Kluger and Adler (1993)	Effect of person- vs computer-mediated feedback.	Loss of face	No	Computer feedback (+)
18. Kuchinke (2000)	The effects of individual and situational antecedents on feedback-seeking behavior in a developmental setting.	Goal-directed behavior Uncertainty reduction	No	Control variables (ns); goal orientation (ns); tolerance for ambiguity (ns); charisma trainer (+); motivation-inspiration trainer (-); agreeableness trainer (ns)
19. Lee <i>et al.</i> (2005)	The effect of leader-member exchange on supervisor – subordinate feedback-seeking.	Performance improvement Face loss	Indirect	Loyalty (+); respect (+)
20. Levy <i>et al.</i> (1995)	Effect of individual and situational determinants on feedback-seeking behavior.	Uncertainty reduction Desire to protect ego Desire to manage impressions	No	Public self-consciousness (+); social anxiety (ns); self-esteem (ns); context (+)
21. Levy <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Effect of transformational and transactional leadership perceptions on feedback-seeking behavior.	Obtaining information to enhance performance Meeting goals	Indirect	Leadership style (+); perception management by exception (ns); perception individual attention (+)
22. London <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Effects of feedback dimensions on feedback-seeking behavior and development.	Intrinsic motivation Public social costs Concern about personal relationships	Indirect	Age (-); gender (ns); reinforcement (ns); evaluative feedback (ns); non-threatening feedback (ns); development focus (ns); empowerment (ns); career motivation (ns); self-consciousness (ns); seeking development (+)

23. Madzar (2001)	Effect of leadership style and individual differences on feedback-seeking behavior.	Uncertainty reduction Face loss Need for approval and self-affirmation	Indirect	Transformational leadership (+); learning goal orientation (+); tolerance for ambiguity (-); Organizational-based self-esteem (ns)
24. Miller and Karakowsky (2005)	Gender differences in feedback-seeking.	Desire for accurate feedback Ego defensiveness Impression management	Indirect	Need for achievement (+); Need for autonomy (+); Need for dominance (+); Public self-consciousness (+); Masculinity (+); Gender × task (+)
25. Morrison (1993)	Role of feedback-seeking behavior in the socialization process.	Job mastery Uncertainty reduction Protecting self and public image	Indirect	Feedback type (+); feedback source (+)
26. Morrison <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Cultural differences in feedback-seeking.	Uncertainty reduction	No	Age (ns); gender (+); nationality (-); self-assertiveness (+); self-reliance (ns); working independently (ns); power distance (-); formal socialization (ns); collective socialization (ns)
27. Morrison and Cummings (1992)	Effect of feedback diagnosticity and performance expectations on feedback-seeking behavior.	Reduce uncertainty Improve performance Protect self-esteem	No	Performance (+); diagnosticity (+)
28. Morrison and Weldon (1990)	Effect of an assigned performance goal on feedback-seeking behavior.	Meeting goals	No	Assigned performance goal (+)
29. Moss <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Development of an instrument to assess feedback management behavior.	To reduce uncertainty To know how well you are doing Impression management (M)	No	External feedback propensity (+); self-monitoring (+); self-esteem (+); need for approval (+); fear of negative evaluation (+); feedback mitigating behavior (+); feedback avoidance behavior (+)
30. Northcraft and Ashford (1990)	Effect of performance expectations and feedback context on feedback-seeking behavior.	Correct errors and attain goals Ego protection Self-presentation	Indirect	Context (+); performance expectations (+); self-esteem (+); trial (+)
31. Renn and Fedor (2001)	Relationship of feedback-seeking behavior with self-efficacy, goal-setting and performance.	Desire for feedback Goal achievement	No	Personal control (+); external feedback propensity (+); age (ns); gender (ns); education (ns); tenure (ns)
32. Roberson <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Effect of stereotype threat on feedback-seeking behavior.	Performance improvement Impression management	Indirect	organizational tenure (ns); gender (ns); education (ns); solo status (ns); stereotype threat (ns)
33. Steelman <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Development of feedback environment scale.	Desire for feedback Ego maintenance	No	Supervisor credibility (+); feedback quality (+); feedback delivery (+); feedback favorability (+); feedback unfavorability (+); source availability (+); promotes feedback-seeking (+)

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## Appendix (continued)

Author	Study focus	Guiding motives	Cost/value model	Antecedents
34. Tuckey <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Effects of motives and goal orientation on feedback-seeking behavior.	Desire for useful information (M) Desire to protect one's ego (M) Defensive impression management (M) Offensive impression management (M)	No	S1: self-assessment (+); ego protection (-); defensive impression management (ns); assertive impression management (ns); learning goal orientation (ns); performance goal orientation (-); avoidance orientation (+) S2: self-assessment (+); ego protection (-); defensive impression management (-); assertive impression management (ns); learning goal orientation (+); performance goal orientation (ns); avoidance goal orientation (ns)
35. Vancouver and Morrison (1995)	Effect of source attributes and individual differences on feedback-seeking behavior.	Reducing uncertainty Enhancing performance Self and public image protection	Indirect	Expertise (+); accessibility (+); relationship (+); reward power (+)
36. Vande-Walle <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Effect of individual, contextual and cognitive determinants on feedback-seeking behavior.	Improving performance and competence development Self-presentation Ego protection	Direct	Experience (-); task complexity (ns); learning goal orientation (+); initiation of structure (+); leader consideration (+); feedback costs (ns); feedback value (+)
37. Vande-Walle and Cummings (1997)	Effect of goal orientation on feedback-seeking behavior.	Goal achievement Mastery achievement	Direct	Avoidance orientation (-); learning goal orientation (ns); performance goal orientation (-); dominant orientation (+); feedback costs (-); feedback value (+); learning goal orientation (+); performance goal orientation (ns); avoidance orientation (-)
38. Waldman and Atwater (2005)	Determinants of feedback-seeking behavior in an upward feedback process .	Self-concept threat Performance improvement	No	Subordinate ratings (-); self-subordinate rating discrepancy (+)
39. Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller (2000)	Antecedents and outcomes of proactivity in the socialization process.	Uncertainty reduction Sense making	No	Age (ns); job tenure (ns); opportunity to interact (+); transition experience (ns); magnitude job change (ns), occupational category (ns); job skill (+), hours per week (ns); neuroticism (ns); extraversion (+); openness to experience (+); agreeableness (+); conscientiousness (ns)
40. Williams <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Effect of context on feedback-seeking behavior.	Desire for feedback Impression management	Indirect	Source supportiveness (+); peer reactions (+)

Note: When studies use different measures of feedback-seeking behavior, we report the zero-order correlation with direct feedback-seeking (inquiry). (M) = measured.