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# How Are We Doing After 30 Years? A Meta-Analytic Review of the Antecedents and Outcomes of Feedback-Seeking Behavior

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*This study provides meta-analytic estimates of the antecedents and consequences of feedback-seeking behavior (FSB). Clear support was found for the guiding cost/benefit framework in the feedback-seeking domain. Organizational tenure, job tenure, and age were negatively related to FSB. Learning and performance goal orientation, external feedback propensity, frequent positive feedback, high self-esteem, a transformational leadership style, and a high-quality relationship were positively associated with FSB. Challenging some of the dominant views in the feedback-seeking domain, the relationship between uncertainty and FSB was negative and the relationship between FSB and performance was small. Finally, inquiry and monitoring are not interchangeable feedback-seeking tactics. So FSB is best represented as an aggregate model instead of a latent model. In the discussion, gaps in the current FSB knowledge are identified and a research agenda for the future is put forward. Future research may benefit from (a) a*

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*systematic and integrative effort examining antecedents of both feedback-seeking strategies on the basis of a self-motives framework, (b) adopting a process perspective of feedback-seeking interactions, and (c) taking the iterative nature of feedback into account.*

**Keywords:** *feedback-seeking behavior; meta-analysis; proactive behavior; information-seeking*

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“How am I doing?!!” In the 1980s, mayor Ed Koch became famous for walking the streets of New York and asking citizens the same question over and over. Apparently, gathering feedback about his administration was important to him. This unorthodox feedback-seeking strategy attracted worldwide attention, as it appealed to a basic human need, the need for obtaining feedback about one’s own performance.

Not surprisingly, individual actions to gather information relevant to one’s own behavior have also become a major topic of research attention in the organizational sciences, building from Ashford and Cummings’s (1983) seminal work. Since its origin, research attention for feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) has steadily grown. A large number of antecedents and outcomes of FSB have been posited and examined in various empirical studies. Although narrative reviews have provided important steps toward integration (e.g., Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Morrison, 2002; VandeWalle, 2003), the diversity of conceptualizations and measurement has slowed progress in the field.

Although the lack of integration hinders strong evidence-based conclusions, there seems to have grown an implicit consensus about the viability of some of the original assumptions of feedback-seeking research. This apparent consensus, however, neglects inconsistencies that can be observed in primary studies and that have remained under-explored to date. For instance, it seems now generally accepted that FSB is an effective self-regulation strategy to improve performance. This is reflected in introductory sections of recent FSB studies. As an example, De Stobbeleir, Ashford, and Buyens (2011: 813) noted, “Research in this dominant view has shown that feedback seeking enables individuals . . . to improve their task performance.” Similarly, Hays and Williams (2011: 497) concluded, “Researchers have hypothesized that feedback seeking reduces uncertainty, which leads to increased job performance and more positive job attitudes (Morrison, 2002). In sum, the positive outcomes related to seeking feedback have been well established.” This seemingly well-established view is challenged, however, by close inspection of primary studies failing to demonstrate a clear link between FSB and performance. Remarkably, Ashford and Black (1996: 211) expressed their concern for the troubling contrast between their findings and previous perspectives some time ago: “The lack of feedback-seeking findings is in contrast to both previous research (cf. Morrison, 1993b) and theorizing (cf. Ashford & Cummings, 1983). In this study, newcomers who sought feedback were not better off, in terms of job performance and satisfaction, than those who did not seek feedback.” Similar inconsistencies have been noted concerning the dominant perspective on uncertainty as an antecedent of FSB and the actual results of primary studies (Anseel & Lievens, 2007).

Thus, we should be careful that consensus on antecedents and outcomes of FSB is based on robust empirical results instead of implicit notions about what is believed to be true.

Therefore, the primary goal of this article is to present a meta-analytic examination of the relationships between FSB and its antecedents and outcomes. We review these antecedents and outcomes and present theoretically based hypotheses as to how each is related to FSB prior to presenting meta-analytic findings.

While most FSB research uses an overall measure of FSB, Ashford and Cummings (1983) originally posited that different motives and situations would lead employees to directly ask colleagues for feedback (*feedback inquiry*) instead of using a more indirect method of observing and inferring feedback information from the environment (*feedback monitoring*). Depending on individual and situational differences, employees would be more inclined to engage in feedback inquiry instead of feedback monitoring and vice versa. A secondary purpose of this study is to meta-analytically examine the relationship between the two dimensions of inquiry and monitoring and to summarize findings as to how these two dimensions relate to the antecedents and outcomes of FSB.

## **Antecedents of FSB**

### *Overarching Cost-Value Framework*

A cost-value framework has been used as the dominant theoretical model of most studies on FSB in organizations (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Morrison & Vancouver, 2000; Park, Schmidt, Scheu, & DeShon, 2007; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000). The general assumption underlying this cost-value framework posits that employees make a conscious assessment of the costs and values that are associated with FSB. Generally, this cost-value analysis is regarded as the primary determinant of subsequent FSB. As an example, imagine the benefits and values of seeking feedback for a newcomer in an organization. As he or she is in a completely new environment, he or she might be motivated to seek feedback for reducing uncertainty. On the other hand, he or she does not want to convey a negative image to new colleagues. Thus, whether this employee will actually be seeking feedback depends on the results of a cost-value analysis: Do the values associated with FSB (uncertainty reduction in this example) outweigh the costs of FSB (negative image in this example)? The individual difference and situational variables typically examined in FSB research, then, are assumed to either directly influence the perception of feedback value or reflect a cost inherent in the feedback-seeking act. Not only have researchers used this cost-value perspective as an overarching framework guiding the identification of new antecedents of FSB, but a limited number of studies have also directly measured these value and cost perceptions (e.g., Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992; Park et al., 2007; VandeWalle et al., 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize,

*Hypothesis 1:* Cost perceptions will be negatively related to FSB.

*Hypothesis 2:* Value perceptions will be positively related to FSB.

## *Demographic Variables*

On the basis of the cost-value framework, we propose that a number of demographic variables such as age and tenure will be related to FSB. On one hand, these demographic variables are assumed to increase the value that employees attach to feedback. When employees are young or new to a job or organization, feedback information is particularly valuable to reduce uncertainty and to foster adaptation in their new role. As employees get older and more experienced in their jobs and organization, they will suffer less from role uncertainty, and consequently they will attach less value to feedback. On the other hand, a decrease in seeking feedback by older and more tenured individuals might not only be due to a decrease in the value of the feedback for reducing uncertainty. Face-loss costs may come into play. Older and more tenured employees may have to deal with expectations from their colleagues that, over time, they know how to do their job and that it is no longer appropriate to rely on others for help. Thus,

*Hypothesis 3:* Organizational tenure, job tenure, and age will be negatively related to FSB.

## *Individual Difference Variables*

### *Feedback Attitudes*

Herold, Parsons, and Rensvold (1996) developed the individual difference construct of external feedback propensity, which refers to an employee's desire for obtaining feedback from an external source. Further elaborating on Herold et al.'s conceptualization, Linderbaum and Levy (2010) recently developed a more comprehensive measure of individuals' attitudes toward feedback. They defined feedback orientation as an individual's overall receptivity to feedback. Individuals with a high propensity for feedback or with a high feedback orientation have a tendency to respond favorably to feedback from colleagues or supervisors, to be more open to feedback, and to use it more (e.g., Fedor et al., 1992; London & Smither, 2002). Therefore, we expect them to attach high value to feedback and thus to frequently engage in FSB.

*Hypothesis 4:* External feedback propensity will be positively related to FSB.

*Hypothesis 5:* Feedback orientation will be positively related to FSB.

### *Goal Orientation*

Goal orientations are personal goal preferences in achievement-related situations. One approach focuses on two broad classes of underlying goals: (a) a learning goal orientation to develop competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations and (b) a performance goal orientation to demonstrate and validate the adequacy of one's competence by seeking favorable judgments and avoiding negative judgments about one's competence.

Note that there are more recent and sophisticated approaches to goal orientation than the learning/performance distinction. Further theoretical developments integrated an approach-avoidance dimension that contrasts the desire of approaching positive outcomes to that of avoiding negative outcomes. Applied to performance goals (e.g., Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996), this dimension has led researchers to distinguish between performance-prove (i.e., focusing on the demonstration of competence relative to others) and performance-avoidance goals (i.e., focusing on the avoidance of demonstrating incompetence relative to others). We use the learning versus performance distinction as it was most influential in early empirical FSB work, making these two dimensions of goal orientation the ones amenable to meta-analytic examination.

VandeWalle's (2003) goal orientation model of FSB relies on the assumption that goal orientations influence how employees cognitively interpret the value and cost of feedback seeking. On the basis of this assumption, VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) proposed that learning-goal-oriented individuals' positive beliefs about ability development and diagnostic value of feedback would lead them to be more focused on the expectancy value of feedback seeking for development and less focused on the self-presentation cost of feedback seeking. Thus, as learning-goal-oriented individuals want to develop their abilities, and feedback has a high expectancy value for such development, they should be motivated to engage in FSB.

*Hypothesis 6: Learning goal orientation will be positively related to FSB.*

Conceptually, the relationship between performance goal orientation and FSB is more difficult to predict. On one hand, performance-goal-oriented individuals are aimed at achieving and demonstrating superior competence relative to others. As such, they are highly interested in conveying a positive image to others. Especially when positive feedback is anticipated, this might lead performance-goal-oriented individuals to seek feedback in public so as to impress others. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that a performance goal orientation may lead to favorable attitudes toward feedback as feedback may be instrumental for enhancing performance and thus also for outperforming others in the long run (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). Thus, actively seeking out performance feedback might also be a desirable option for those with a high performance goal orientation.

On the other hand, people high on performance goal orientation are preoccupied with their self-image. They want to avoid failure (especially in the presence of others). For them, feedback might reveal that they did not attain their performance standards, an outcome that they will try to avoid or react negatively to. Thus, the costs of seeking feedback, especially if the outcome is uncertain and negative feedback in public is looming, will deter them from seeking feedback. Given that there is also some evidence that performance goal orientation is related to anxiety, which could interfere with openness toward feedback (Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000), one could hypothesize that the cost of seeking feedback will outweigh some of the benefits leading to less FSB.

Thus, there are competing predictions. If the instrumentality of feedback for performance is more powerful than concerns for self-image, then performance goal orientation will be positively related to FSB; if concern for self-image is more powerful than the instrumentality of feedback, then performance goal orientation will be negatively related to FSB. Thus,

we examine the performance goal orientation–FSB relationship as a research question, rather than offering a directional hypothesis.

*Research Question 1:* What is the relationship between performance goal orientation and FSB?

### *Self-Worth*

The information disclosed in a feedback message is not neutral to the feedback receiver; it often contains unfavorable information about unwanted or desired behavior. Feedback might hurt or boost employees' feelings of self-worth (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that *self-esteem*, a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth, will affect the likelihood of FSB. Whereas self-esteem refers to a global cognitive appraisal of the self-concept, *self-efficacy* refers to a context-specific assessment of competence to perform a specific task or a range of tasks in a given domain. Given that the same underlying feelings of self-worth will be involved in feedback-seeking decisions, self-esteem and self-efficacy are assumed to play a similar role in the feedback-seeking process. We expect that the cost of FSB will be higher for someone with low self-esteem or low self-efficacy because of the potential detrimental impact negative feedback might have on the feedback seeker's self-worth. As a result, employees low in self-esteem or low in self-efficacy will seek less feedback than those high in self-esteem or self-efficacy.<sup>1</sup>

*Hypothesis 7:* Self-esteem will be positively related to FSB.

*Hypothesis 8:* Self-efficacy will be positively related to FSB.

### *Tolerance for Ambiguity*

Tolerance for ambiguity refers to one's preference for clear-cut answers and expectations in uncertain situations (Ashford & Cummings, 1985). Individuals low on tolerance for ambiguity are likely to find ambiguity a source of psychological discomfort and will be motivated to resolve that discomfort. So they might consider feedback an especially valuable resource to reduce ambiguity leading to a higher likelihood of FSB.

*Hypothesis 9:* There will be a negative relationship between tolerance for ambiguity and FSB.

### *Situational Characteristics*

#### *Uncertainty and Role Ambiguity*

Several scholars have proposed that reducing uncertainty is one of the driving forces behind FSB as growing feelings of uncertainty should increase the value of feedback (e.g., Morrison, 2002). Two types of uncertainty have typically been distinguished in FSB research. On one hand,

contingency uncertainty refers to uncertainties pertaining to the contingency between job performance and the attainment of secondary organizational reinforcements (i.e., promotions). On the other hand, role ambiguity pertains to specific uncertainties directly related to the performance of the individual job role, the nature of job responsibilities, and the expectations of others for behavior in that job (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1985). Given that both are conceptually linked to feelings of uncertainty, we expect that the same mechanisms will be activated and expect similar relationships with FSB.

*Hypothesis 10:* There will be a positive relationship between contingency uncertainty and FSB.

*Hypothesis 11:* There will be a positive relationship between role ambiguity and FSB.

### *Feedback Sign*

One of the more robust findings in the feedback literature is that the sign of feedback is an important determinant of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive reactions to feedback (Kinicki, Prussia, Wu, & McKee-Ryan, 2004). The type of feedback employees receive will also influence the perceived costs and value of subsequent feedback seeking. However, the interplay of costs and benefits involved in these situations may be complicated. On one hand, receiving negative feedback indicates that performance improvement is necessary. Additional feedback will be instrumental in remedying bad performance, and thus the value of diagnostic feedback should increase, leading to a higher desire for feedback. Conversely, after positive feedback, employees may see less value in additional feedback as their performance level is above standards, leading to less desire for feedback. On the other hand, negative feedback indicates that performance is below standards and will affect employees' subsequent performance expectations. Individuals with low performance expectations may seek out less feedback to avoid face-loss costs and the ego costs associated with repeated negative feedback. Conversely, positive feedback creates high performance expectations, which may tempt individuals to seek more feedback for impression management reasons and to enhance their self-esteem.

In the present meta-analysis, we examined positive and negative feedback as independent dimensions. This is in line with a series of studies in the feedback domain that have conceptualized the amount of negative and positive feedback employees receive as separate variables (e.g., Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006; Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). As there are mostly higher value perceptions and few costs associated with seeking feedback after receiving frequent positive feedback, we expect that the amount of positive feedback received by employees will be positively related to FSB.

*Hypothesis 12:* There will be a positive relationship between the amount of positive feedback received and FSB.

However, the competing perspectives on the impact of negative feedback on FSB lead us to examine this as a research question, rather than posing a hypothesis. If the instrumental value of the feedback received outweighs the ego costs, then there will be a positive relation-



ship between the amount of negative feedback and FSB; if ego costs outweigh instrumental value, then there will be a negative relationship between the amount of negative feedback and FSB.

*Research Question 2:* What is the relationship between the amount of negative feedback received and FSB?

### *Feedback Source Characteristics*

A number of feedback source characteristics have been proposed to affect the cost value underlying feedback-seeking acts. A first characteristic is how the feedback seeker evaluates the feedback source's expertise and trustworthiness. Previous research has shown that individuals' responses to performance feedback are influenced by the credibility attributed to the source in regard to the information being received. A highly credible source is a person who is perceived to have acquired relevant knowledge and expertise, and is thus a good source to provide accurate information on one's performance (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Steelman et al., 2004). In the eyes of the feedback seeker, feedback from a credible source should therefore be more likely to contain helpful information to improve one's performance. In sum, the more credible the feedback source, the higher the perceived instrumental value of the feedback for improving performance, and thus the more likely individuals are to seek feedback from this source (Fedor et al., 1992; Levy, Cober, & Miller, 2002; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995).

Second, transformational leadership is expected to affect FSB through its effects on the costs associated with FSB. Transformational leaders demonstrate individualized consideration by attending to each follower's needs and by supporting the follower. When leaders show individualized consideration for their subordinates, the costs associated with seeking feedback decrease (VandeWalle et al., 2000). Furthermore, a key characteristic of transformational leaders is that they provide intellectual stimulation by challenging assumptions, stimulating employees to think deeply about things and figuring out better ways to execute their tasks. Accordingly, transformational leaders create a context where employees feel safe to speak up and ask for additional information. By instilling feedback-seeking norms and role modeling, the face-loss costs associated with seeking feedback decrease (Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999). Thus, by decreasing the perceived costs that typically restrain employees from seeking feedback, transformational leadership should be related to increased FSB (Levy et al., 2002; Madzar, 2001).

Third, the quality of the relationship between the feedback source and the feedback seeker will also affect feedback-seeking tactics (Levy et al., 2002; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995; VandeWalle et al., 2000). The better the relationship, the less likely the source will react negatively to feedback-seeking attempts, and the more likely he or she will provide feedback in a sensitive and constructive manner. The perceived ego and social costs of feedback inquiry will be lower, and the feedback obtained is likely to be more detailed and helpful. Thus, we expect that individuals will be more willing to seek feedback from a person with whom they have a good relationship.

*Hypothesis 13:* There will be a positive relationship between feedback source credibility and FSB.

*Hypothesis 14:* There will be a positive relationship between transformational leadership and FSB.

*Hypothesis 15:* There will be a positive relationship between the relationship quality with the feedback source and FSB.

## **Outcomes of FSB**

By conceptualizing FSB as a proactive self-regulation strategy, Ashford and Cummings's (1983) original assumption was that seeking feedback should be instrumental for employees to reduce job-related uncertainty, attain instrumental goals, and surmount organizational obstacles. Seeking feedback should help employees gain greater clarity about how things work in the organization and what others expect of them. The better employees understand how things work and what is expected, the more likely it is that they will be able to meet those expectations and perform well in their jobs. Feedback also allows employees to make corrections in their performance over time. Individuals who seek feedback should be better able to adjust their behavior to the unique demands of their setting and consequently attain higher performance evaluations.

*Hypothesis 16:* There will be a positive relationship between FSB and performance.

Furthermore, given the positive associations among role clarity, performance, and job satisfaction, employees who perform better and attain more role clarity should also experience greater job satisfaction (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001).

*Hypothesis 17:* There will be a positive relationship between FSB and job satisfaction.

Apart from performance and job satisfaction, we are also interested in the relationships between FSB and other proactive behaviors such as relationship building, networking, and socializing. Although these are not outcomes of FSB, the strength of the interrelationships may shed some light on the question of whether employees use FSB as a proactive self-regulation strategy in conjunction with other proactive strategies. Recently, organizational scholars have begun to explore the general dynamics of proactivity by drawing parallels between multiple proactive behaviors (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). These exploratory analyses may be informative to these efforts by providing meta-analytic estimates of the strength of the associations between FSB and other proactive strategies.

## **Distinguishing FSB Tactics**

Since its inception, there has been confusion about the appropriate operationalization of FSB with the majority of studies in this domain not separating the facets of inquiry and monitoring, but rather utilizing an overall measure of FSB. As noted by Morrison

(2002: 240), “These different ways of measuring feedback seeking may account for the conflicting findings with respect to outcomes.” This issue is indeed fundamental because it relates not only to how FSB should be measured, but also to how results of research should be interpreted and how FSB should be conceptualized in future theory-building efforts. For example, is it appropriate to draw inferences about feedback-seeking studies that considered only one dimension of FSB? What kinds of inferences can be made about FSB from a study in which the two strategies have different relationships with predictors, outcomes, or both? These questions are difficult to answer without more information about the relationship between FSB dimensions and the overall construct (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998).

As noted, one conceptualization might be that the feedback-seeking domain is best represented by an overall FSB construct, with the frequency of specific behaviors (e.g., inquiry and monitoring) loading on the overall construct. This perspective conceptualizes FSB as a *reflective* (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Jarvis, 2005) or *latent* (Law et al., 1998) multidimensional construct. Models of this type posit that covariation among its different facets is explained by variation in an underlying common latent factor. An important implication of this model is that the indicators in this type of measurement model should be highly correlated due to the fact that they all reflect the same underlying construct. A second implication is that dropping one indicator from the measurement model will not change the meaning of the construct and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. Thus, if FSB is best conceptualized as a latent model, conclusions about overall FSB can be drawn from observing relationships of only one of the two feedback-seeking tactics.

An alternative conceptualization is to view each tactic as a discrete construct with its own set of antecedents and outcomes. This perspective conceptualizes overall FSB as a *formative* (MacKenzie et al., 2005) or *aggregate* (Law et al., 1998) multidimensional construct. This model posits that the facets jointly make up the composite construct and that the meaning of the composite construct is derived from its facets. This implies that because the measures are not driven by an underlying composite variable, the model does not assume or require the measures to be correlated. A second implication is that one should not drop a formative indicator from the measurement model as it may alter the meaning of the overall construct. As the measures of a formative model are not redundant (i.e., they tap different facets of the conceptual domain) and the construct is a composite of all the indicators, dropping a measure from a formative model may ignore a unique part of the conceptual domain and change the meaning of the variable altogether. Thus, if FSB is best conceptualized as a formative/aggregate multidimensional construct, conclusions about overall FSB can be drawn only from measuring both feedback inquiry and monitoring.

Two types of evidence are typically informative to support the distinctiveness of the two constructs and thus to determine how FSB is best conceptualized as a multidimensional model (see Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007).<sup>2</sup> First, the two dimensions should not be too highly correlated (e.g., lower than their respective reliabilities). Ashford (1986) originally reported an observed correlation of .54, suggesting that the two dimensions are relatively distinct. However, we believe a meta-analytic estimate, correcting for statistical artifacts, provides more convincing evidence regarding the empirical distinctiveness of these constructs. Thus, we report such a meta-analysis.

If there is evidence that the two focal constructs are not too highly correlated, then the next step is to examine whether the two constructs show differing patterns of correlations with other constructs. Meta-analytic summaries of these correlations are useful for testing for this type of distinctiveness between the focal constructs (e.g., Berry et al., 2007; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002), and we report such meta-analyses. We signal in advance that the number of studies differentiating between monitoring and inquiry for the various antecedents and outcomes of FSB is generally quite small, too small in our judgment to permit strong conclusions about differential relationships by FSB dimension. As such we do not devote space here to developing hypotheses about differential relationships for monitoring and inquiry, as meta-analytic data are currently not available to meaningfully test such hypotheses.

## **Method**

### *Literature Search*

A comprehensive literature search was conducted, encompassing both published and unpublished research on FSB. First, we conducted a computerized search of the PsycINFO, Web of Science, Dissertation Abstracts, and ABI Inform Databases, from 1983 to 2011, using keywords such as FSB, feedback interest, feedback inquiry, feedback monitoring, information-seeking, help-seeking, and their variants. Second, the Social Sciences Citation Index was used to identify any articles that cited the seminal articles by Ashford and Cummings (1983, 1985). Third, we searched the Digital Dissertation Web site using the keywords “feedback-seeking” from 2000 to 2010. Fourth, manual searches of the conference programs for the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology and Academy of Management conferences were carried out from 2000 onward. Fifth, prominent researchers in the feedback-seeking area were contacted. We sent them the list of articles we had considered and asked them to note or share any additional articles (published, in press, or working papers). Sixth, the reference sections of located primary studies and reviews (Anseel, Lievens, & Levy, 2007; Ashford et al., 2003; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morrison, 2002; VandeWalle, 2003) were examined for relevant citations.

### *Criteria for Inclusion*

In choosing studies for this meta-analysis, we had three inclusion criteria. First, we included only studies that measured actual FSB. We determined whether a measure was tapping FSB based on the alignment of the measure to the definition of FSB provided by Ashford (1986: 466): “A conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behaviors.” We excluded all studies focusing on feedback-seeking-related tendencies that did not measure the frequency of actual behavior. First, studies that referred to feedback-seeking intentions (e.g., Levy et al., 2002), preferences for specific feedback

types (e.g., Anseel & Lievens, 2007: Study 1), and choices between different available feedback types (e.g., Park et al., 2007) were not included.

Second, we also differentiated between measures of FSB versus related behaviors such as information seeking (e.g., Madzar, 2001), advice seeking (Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009), and help seeking (Nadler, Ellis, & Bar, 2003). Information-seeking measures were included only when the study separately reported correlations for information seeking about performance appraisal information (e.g., Morrison, 1993b).

Third, studies had to be situated in an actual (e.g., Ashford, 1986) or closely simulated organizational context (e.g., Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995) to be included. This implied that scenario and vignette studies were excluded from this meta-analysis (e.g., VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997: Study 2). Studies that focused on FSB in an educational context were also excluded (e.g., VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997: Study 1). Furthermore, feedback-seeking studies in exclusively clinical (e.g., Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992), developmental (e.g., Cassidy, Ziv, Mehta, & Feeney, 2003), or social/interpersonally oriented (e.g., Bernichon, Cook, & Brown, 2003) settings were excluded.

From the remaining set of studies, we included those that contained enough information to extract at least (a) a zero-order correlation between inquiry and monitoring, (b) a zero-order correlation between inquiry and some other variable, (c) a zero-order correlation between monitoring and some other variable, or (d) a zero-order correlation between overall FSB and some other variable.

This resulted in an initial list of 115 articles, which was pared down to 69 that met our full inclusion criteria and were included in subsequent analyses. This included 36 studies that reported only overall FSB and 33 that included either inquiry or both inquiry and monitoring feedback-seeking tactics. The resulting set of studies may be smaller than those that have been discussed in previous qualitative reviews (e.g., Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2003). The stringent criteria used in this meta-analysis may also explain why, for instance, the number of studies examining the relationship between goal orientation dimensions and FSB is somewhat lower than reported in a recent meta-analysis on the goal orientation construct (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). However, these stringent criteria ensured that we were not comparing apples to oranges. For instance, empirical studies have shown that feedback-seeking *intentions and preferences* are quite different from FSB, as they often do not result in actual feedback-seeking *behavior* (e.g., Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Levy et al., 1995). Thus, for a number of variables, only one or two samples were available. Although caution is warranted in drawing conclusions on the basis of the available data in these cases, meta-analysis still has its merits here. As noted by Schmidt, Hunter, Pearlman, and Hirsh (1985: 749),

Even with small numbers of studies and small N's, meta-analysis is still the optimal method for integrating findings across studies. In the absence of such interim meta-analyses, psychologists would likely base judgments on the findings of individual studies or nonquantitative (i.e., narrative) reviews of the literature—both of which are much more likely to lead to error. Thus, such meta-analyses are, in fact, very desirable.

## *Coding Procedures*

For each study, the correlation among inquiry, monitoring, overall FSB, and the other variable was coded. Studies were coded by two of the authors. They coded a common set of 15 articles to assess coder agreement. Agreement was quite high (> 90% for all variables), with disagreements resolved through discussion. The rest of the articles were split between the two coders. We conducted separate analyses for overall or composite measures of FSB and those that measured inquiry and monitoring behaviors separately. In our overall analyses, we included both overall measures and composite measures of FSB. Composite measures were usually unit-weighted composites of measures of monitoring and inquiry when reported as separate dimensions. For studies that investigated inquiry and monitoring as separate strategies, we were specifically concerned with inquiry and monitoring that focused on performance information because this was most applicable to the Ashford (1986) definition of FSB. For example, when studies parsed inquiry into dimensions or sources, we coded only inquiry measures that were described as performance based.

In addition, FSB was occasionally investigated separately from different sources (i.e., feedback from supervisors, feedback from peers). Whenever possible we composited across sources, but if intercorrelation information was not available between sources, we averaged across sources to create independent data points. The reliability of composite measures was calculated using the Mosier formula (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Mosier reliabilities consider specific factor variance (i.e., variance unique to monitoring or inquiry measures) as true variance in reliability estimates.

## *Analyses*

Our analytic strategy utilized Hunter and Schmidt (2004) random effects meta-analyses. Our estimation of construct-level relationships corrected for unreliability, using alpha coefficients, in both the predictor and criterion variables using artifact distributions. Descriptive statistics of the feedback-seeking measure reliability distributions are provided in Table 1 for composite FSB ( $M = .85$ ,  $SD = .07$ ), inquiry ( $M = .82$ ,  $SD = .10$ ), and monitoring ( $M = .83$ ,  $SD = .05$ ) measures. Descriptive statistics for reliability distributions for variables correlated with feedback seeking are also included for variables where such information existed. On average, feedback-seeking measures appear to have a respectable level of reliability. As selection factors seemed unlikely in natural or simulated organizational settings and estimates of feedback-seeking variability in unrestricted samples are unavailable, we did not correct our construct-level estimates for range restriction. We also calculated the 90% credibility interval (used to determine whether the distribution of effect size measure includes a correlation of zero) and 95% confidence intervals (used to determine the range within which the mean correlation in the population would be expected to fall) for each relationship and utilized these to decide whether our hypotheses were supported. Specifically, we deemed that directional hypotheses

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Information on Statistical Artifact**  
**Distributions Used to Correct Validities**

Artifact Distribution	Number of Values	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean of the Square Roots of Reliabilities	<i>SD</i> of the Square Roots of Reliabilities
Feedback-seeking variables					
Reliability of composite feedback-seeking measures	45	.85	.07	.92	.04
Reliability of inquiry feedback measures	21	.82	.10	.90	.06
Reliability of monitoring feedback measures	17	.83	.05	.91	.03
Variables correlated with feedback-seeking					
Individual differences					
Feedback orientation	4	.84	.06	.91	.04
External feedback propensity	2	.79	.01	.89	.01
Performance goal orientation	7	.79	.05	.89	.03
Learning goal orientation	11	.80	.08	.90	.05
Self-efficacy	4	.89	.08	.94	.04
Self-esteem	2	.83	.01	.91	.01
Tolerance for ambiguity	5	.68	.11	.82	.07
Situational characteristics					
Feedback environment	5	.92	.04	.96	.02
Uncertainty	4	.73	.09	.85	.05
Role ambiguity	8	.84	.09	.91	.05
Transformational leadership	3	.91	.03	.95	.01
Leader-member exchange	7	.82	.03	.91	.02
Positive feedback	3	.82	.09	.90	.05
Negative feedback	2	.78	.11	.88	.06
Cost of feedback	9	.83	.06	.91	.04
Value of feedback	6	.79	.09	.89	.05
Source/feedback credibility	4	.86	.08	.93	.04
Outcomes					
Job satisfaction	5	.85	.08	.92	.04
Job performance	9	.86	.07	.92	.04
Build relationship	3	.84	.05	.91	.03
Networking	4	.87	.04	.93	.02
General socialization	3	.86	.07	.93	.04

were supported if the 95% confidence interval was fully within the expected direction; however, we also noted if the 90% credibility interval was not. In addition, for hypotheses of a differential relationship of studied variables with inquiry and monitoring, we declared support if the 95% confidence intervals did not overlap. We note that the small sample sizes for many of the variables included in this meta-analysis make this a relatively stringent test.

We report relationships between a measure of FSB and other variables that were examined in three or more studies. If a variable was investigated in three or more studies for one measure of FSB (e.g., inquiry) but fell below this threshold for other measures of FSB, we also reported these relationships for comparison purposes.

**Table 2**  
**Meta-Analytic Correlations Between Feedback-Seeking Behavior and Its Antecedents and Outcomes**

	Hypothesis	Supported	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i> <sub>obs</sub>	<i>SD</i> ( <i>r</i> <sub>obs</sub> )	<i>ρ</i>	<i>SD</i> ( <i>ρ</i> )	90% CV	95% CI	
Cost/value perceptions											
Cost of feedback	Positive (H1)	N	10	1,512	-.14	.19	-.17	.20	.09	-.23	-.11
Value of feedback	Positive (H2)	Y	8	1,517	.36	.11	.44	.10	.31	.39	.49
Demographic variables											
Organizational tenure	Negative (H3)	Y	11	2,722	-.17	.11	-.19	.10	-.06	-.23	-.15
Job tenure	Negative (H3)	Y	13	3,089	-.13	.12	-.15	.11	-.01	-.19	-.11
Age	Negative (H3)	Y	13	2,292	-.12	.10	-.13	.06	-.05	-.17	-.09
Individual differences											
External feedback propensity	Positive (H4)	Y	4	770	.29	.09	.35	.06	.27	.27	.43
Feedback orientation—Inquiry	Positive (H5)	Y	4	655	.34	.07	.41	—	.41	.33	.49
Learning goal orientation	Positive (H6)	N	10	4,462	.12	.13	.14	.15	-.05	.11	.17
Performance goal orientation	RQ1	7	1,577	.16	.15	.20	.17	-.02	.14	.26	
Self-esteem	Positive (H7)	N	4	826	.03	.14	.04	.15	-.15	-.04	.12
Self-efficacy	Positive (H8)	Y	5	1,055	.18	.12	.21	.12	.06	.14	.28
Tolerance for ambiguity	Positive (H9)	N	6	2,912	-.05	.13	-.07	.16	.13	-.12	-.02
Situational characteristics											
Uncertainty	Positive (H10)	N	3	651	-.09	.18	-.12	.21	.15	-.22	-.02
Role ambiguity	Positive (H11)	N	9	1,546	.00	.21	.00	.23	-.29	-.06	.06
Positive feedback	Positive (H12)	Y	4	695	.19	.08	.23	.04	.18	.14	.32
Negative feedback	RQ2	3	556	.21	.09	.26	.07	.17	.16	.36	
Credibility	Positive (H13)	N	5	613	.10	.14	.12	.12	-.03	.03	.21
Transformational leadership	Positive (H14)	Y	3	2,385	.29	.03	.33	—	.33	.29	.37
Leader—member exchange	Positive (H15)	Y	5	839	.15	.06	.17	—	.17	.09	.25
Outcomes											
Job performance	Positive (H16)	N	11	1,910	.06	.15	.07	.15	-.12	.02	.12
Job satisfaction	Positive (H17)	Y	8	925	.23	.17	.27	.17	.05	.20	.34
Build relationship	RQ3	4	790	.45	.13	.53	.13	.36	.47	.59	
Networking	RQ3	4	790	.30	.13	.35	.13	.18	.28	.42	
General socializing	RQ3	3	492	.29	.07	.34	—	.34	.25	.43	

Note: For reported hypotheses, the hypothesized direction is listed first and the corresponding hypothesis name is in parentheses.

## Results

Meta-analytic results for the predictors and outcomes of overall FSB, inquiry, and monitoring are reported in Table 2.

### *Cost/Value Perceptions*

As can be seen in Table 2, individuals are on average less likely to seek feedback if they perceive the cost of feedback to be high ( $\rho = -.17$ ,  $k = 10$ ), though the 90% credibility interval does include positive values. Therefore, although the mean is in the direction predicted by H1, the hypothesis is not supported. Supporting the cost/value framework, individuals are more likely to seek feedback if they value the feedback ( $\rho = .44$ ,  $k = 8$ ), supporting H2.



### *Demographic Variables*

In line with one of the main assumptions that as individuals' experience increases, individuals become more comfortable with their role and seek out feedback less frequently, our results show that organizational tenure ( $\rho = -.19, k = 11$ ), job tenure ( $\rho = -.15, k = 13$ ), and age ( $\rho = -.13, k = 13$ ) were all negatively related to FSB. Thus, H3 was supported.

### *Individual Differences*

In line with our theoretical predictions, individuals high on external feedback propensity were more likely to seek feedback ( $\rho = .35, k = 4$ ), thus supporting H4. H5 could not be tested using a measure of overall FSB as all studies of feedback orientation examined only the inquiry dimension. Those studies did find the expected positive relationship ( $\rho = .41, k = 4$ ), which we view as support for the hypothesis.

Regarding H6, learning goal orientation was positively associated with overall feedback seeking ( $\rho = .14, k = 10$ ). However, the 90% credibility interval suggests there might be some situations where the relationship between learning goal orientation and FSB is zero or slightly negative (i.e., moderators of this relationship). Regarding Research Question 1, performance goal orientation also had a mean positive relationship with FSB ( $\rho = .20, k = 7$ ), though the credibility interval also indicated the potential for negative relationships. Apparently, for performance-goal-oriented individuals, the instrumental value of feedback for demonstrating competence to others generally outweighs the possible costs associated with potential negative feedback in public.

The role of self-esteem in the feedback-seeking process has been much debated (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003). Our results show that although self-esteem was weakly positively related to overall FSB ( $\rho = .04, k = 4$ ), the credibility interval included zero. Thus, H7 was not supported. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, exhibited a moderately positive relationship with overall FSB ( $\rho = .21, k = 5$ ), which provided support for H8. In line with our theoretical predictions, tolerance for ambiguity was negatively but weakly related to FSB ( $\rho = -.07, k = 6$ ), though the credibility interval included zero. Thus, H9 was not supported.

### *Situational Characteristics*

Surprisingly, higher levels of uncertainty were associated with lower levels of overall FSB ( $\rho = -.12, k = 3$ ). This finding seems to contradict one of the main assumptions in the feedback-seeking domain that individuals seek feedback to reduce feelings of uncertainty. However, the credibility interval for this relationship includes the possibility of positive relationships in some situations, suggesting the presence of moderators of the relationship. Thus, H10 was not supported. Findings for role ambiguity were also not in line with the uncertainty reduction perspective in feedback-seeking research. Role ambiguity was unrelated to FSB ( $\rho = .00, k = 9$ ), and thus H11 was not supported. Apparently, reducing role ambiguity is not a strong motivator of FSB.

Our findings support the assumption that individuals will seek more feedback after frequent positive feedback ( $\rho = .23, k = 4$ ), supporting H12. Similarly, individuals also seek more feedback after frequent negative feedback ( $\rho = .46, k = 3$ ), thereby answering Research Question 2.

Perceptions of feedback credibility had a positive mean correlation with FSB ( $\rho = .12, k = 5$ ). However, the credibility interval included zero, thus failing to support H13. H14 and H15 were supported, as transformational leadership ( $\rho = .33, k = 3$ ) and relationship quality ( $\rho = .17, k = 5$ ) were both related to higher frequency of FSB.

### *Outcomes of FSB*

While the mean correlations between FSB and job performance was positive ( $\rho = .07, k = 11$ ), the correlation was small and the credibility interval included zero. Thus, H16 was not supported. In support of H17, FSB and job satisfaction were positively related ( $\rho = .27, k = 8$ ). In addition, FSB was related to other organizational socialization and proactivity behaviors. Individuals who sought feedback were also more likely to engage in building relationships ( $\rho = .53, k = 4$ ), networking ( $\rho = .35, k = 4$ ), and socialization behaviors ( $\rho = .34, k = 3$ ).

### *Dimensionality of FSB: Inquiry Versus Monitoring*

We found an observed correlation of  $r = .43$  ( $k = 31$ ) between the two FSB dimensions of feedback and monitoring. Although the two dimensions are clearly strongly correlated, the correlation does not approach the reliability of either measure even when corrected for unreliability ( $\rho = .52$ ), thus indicating that the two feedback-seeking methods are separable. Thus, it would be useful to examine the relationship between the two FSB dimensions and our set of antecedents and outcomes. Similar correlations with antecedents and outcomes would be consistent with viewing FSB as a reflective/latent construct, while a pattern of differing antecedents and outcomes would support viewing FSB as a formative/aggregate construct.

Unfortunately, for a large number of the antecedents and outcomes of interest the number of studies of the inquiry and monitoring dimensions is too small for a meaningful assessment. Table 3 presents meta-analytic findings for these relationships. This table makes clear which relationships have and have not been examined. There are markedly more studies examining the inquiry dimension than the monitoring dimension; for many antecedents there are zero or one studies of the monitoring dimension.

There are two variables for which there are multiple studies of both monitoring and inquiry and for which differential relationships are found (i.e., the 95% confidence intervals around the mean correlations do not overlap). The first is cost of feedback seeking, where the relationship is negative for inquiry ( $\rho = -.25, k = 8$ ) and essentially zero for monitoring ( $\rho = -.01, k = 7$ ). The second is job performance, where the relationship is positive for inquiry ( $\rho = .13, k = 4$ ) and essentially zero for monitoring ( $\rho = -.03, k = 2$ ).

**Table 3**  
**Meta-Analytic Correlations Between Inquiry and Monitoring, and Their Antecedents and Outcomes**

	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i> <sub>obs</sub>	<i>SD</i> ( <sub>obs</sub> )	<i>ρ</i>	<i>SD</i> ( <i>ρ</i> )	90% CV	95% CI
Feedback-seeking tactics								
Inquiry—Monitoring	31	6,477	.43	.22	.52	.26	.19	.50 .54
Cost/value perceptions								
Cost of feedback—Inquiry	8	1,366	-.21	.10	-.25	.08	-.15	-.31 -.19
Cost of feedback—Monitoring	7	1,186	-.01	.14	-.01	.13	.16	-.08 .06
Value of feedback—Inquiry	4	614	.10	.24	.29	.07	.20	.20 .38
Value of feedback—Monitoring	4	614	.30	.06	.37	—	.37	.28 .46
Demographic variables								
Organizational tenure—Inquiry	6	1,059	-.17	.14	-.19	.13	-.02	-.25 -.13
Organizational tenure—Monitoring	4	753	-.19	.16	-.21	.15	-.02	-.29 -.13
Job tenure—Inquiry	4	1,114	-.20	.10	-.22	.09	-.10	-.28 -.16
Job tenure—Monitoring	4	1,114	-.18	.08	-.20	.07	-.11	-.26 -.14
Age—Inquiry	6	985	-.11	.11	-.12	.08	-.02	-.19 -.05
Age—Monitoring	4	679	-.21	.10	-.23	.07	-.14	-.31 -.15
Individual differences								
External feedback propensity—Inquiry	1	156	.24	—	.30	—	—	.12 .48
External feedback propensity—Monitoring	1	156	.19	—	.23	—	—	.05 .42
Feedback orientation—Inquiry	4	655	.34	.07	.41	—	.41	.33 .49
Learning goal orientation—Inquiry	1	130	.33	—	.41	—	—	.22 .59
Self-esteem—Inquiry	2	487	-.05	.13	-.06	.13	.11	-.17 .05
Self-esteem—Monitoring	2	487	.02	.06	.02	—	.02	-.09 .13
Self-efficacy—Inquiry	1	279	.04	—	.05	—	—	-.09 .18
Self-efficacy—Monitoring	1	279	-.02	—	.02	—	—	-.16 .16
Tolerance for ambiguity—Inquiry	2	275	-.05	.14	-.07	.15	.12	-.23 .09
Tolerance for ambiguity—Monitoring	3	431	-.23	.01	-.30	—	-.30	-.42 -.18
Situational characteristics								
Feedback environment—Inquiry	3	535	.34	.13	.40	.13	.23	.32 .48
Uncertainty—Inquiry	3	606	-.14	.16	-.18	.19	.06	-.28 -.08
Uncertainty—Monitoring	3	606	-.07	.13	-.09	.13	.08	-.19 .01
Role ambiguity—Inquiry	6	1,033	-.02	.13	-.02	.12	.13	-.09 .05
Role ambiguity—Monitoring	6	1,033	.04	.16	.04	.17	-.18	-.03 .21
Positive feedback—Inquiry	1	387	.07	—	.09	—	—	-.04 .21
Positive feedback—Monitoring	1	387	.13	—	.16	—	—	.04 .28
Negative feedback—Inquiry	1	387	.37	—	.46	—	—	.36 .57
Negative feedback—Monitoring	1	387	.09	—	.11	—	—	-.01 .23
Credibility—Inquiry	4	624	.18	.08	.22	.04	.17	.13 .31
Credibility—Monitoring	3	444	.02	.18	.02	.18	-.21	-.09 .13
Leader-member exchange—Inquiry	3	440	.35	.06	.43	—	.43	.33 .53
Leader-member exchange—Monitoring	1	134	-.20	—	-.02	—	—	-.22 .17
Outcomes								
Job performance—Inquiry	4	922	.11	.14	.13	.15	-.06	.05 .21
Job performance—Monitoring	2	666	-.03	.10	-.03	.10	—	-.12 .06
Job satisfaction—Inquiry	3	208	.14	.03	.16	—	.16	.00 .32
Job satisfaction—Monitoring	3	208	.08	.20	.10	.19	-.14	-.06 .26

## Discussion

We provide meta-analytic estimates of the antecedents and consequences of FSB as it has been studied in the past 25 years. Thus, our results put forth more firm conclusions than previously available regarding a number of dominant themes and debated issues in the feedback-seeking domain. There are a number of long-standing assumptions in the feedback-seeking domain that were confirmed in the present meta-analysis. First, we found support for the guiding cost/benefit framework in the feedback-seeking domain. Higher feedback value perceptions were associated with more FSB. Higher cost perceptions were associated with less of the inquiry dimension of FSB, though not associated with monitoring. This is reasonable, as inquiry is generally more costly than monitoring. Second, FSB seems to have particular value for young and inexperienced employees as organizational tenure, job tenure, and age were negatively related to FSB. Third, individual and situational factors that are assumed to increase the value of feedback motivate employees to seek more feedback. For instance, individuals with a high learning orientation and an external feedback propensity seek feedback more frequently, and credible feedback sources evoke more frequent FSB. Fourth, specific variables that were proposed to affect FSB through downplaying its potential face loss, effort, and ego costs seemed to play their expected role: Frequent positive feedback, high self-efficacy, a transformational leadership style, and a high-quality relationship were positively associated with FSB.

However, there were also a number of findings that shed light on issues where differing hypotheses can be offered as to the direction of relationships. First, contrary to the position that employees pursuing performance goals will refrain from feedback seeking because it may make them look bad in the eyes of their colleagues, we found that performance goals were positively associated with FSB. This seems to indicate that performance-goal-oriented employees may also perceive FSB as a viable strategy for improving their performance, notwithstanding its potential cost to their image. Of course, caution is needed given the more recent distinction between performance-prove and performance-avoidance goal orientations. If more primary studies become available, it might be worthwhile to meta-analytically examine whether this positive relationship stems primarily from performance-prove orientation, as this might be more closely related to the instrumental value of feedback.

Second, the amount of negative feedback was a strong predictor of FSB. Our results suggest that the instrumental value of feedback may be a stronger driver of FSB after poor performance. Employees may decide to seek out feedback to remedy their poor performance despite potential ego and image costs. This is an important finding as one of the original assumptions that started feedback-seeking research (Ashford & Cummings, 1983) is that employees do not wait for feedback to be given, but in the absence of feedback will seek it themselves. However, it seems that once employees have started seeking feedback (in the absence of feedback), the type of feedback subsequently received will also influence future feedback-seeking decisions. Thus, different processes may be at play depending on the prior availability of feedback and the type of feedback that is available. To date, research has been rather vague about the interplay over time between different motives that are believed to drive instrumental FSB. To better understand the role of prior feedback on FSB, future

research needs to develop a dynamic process model that describes different cycles of FSB to examine how different motives interact over time depending on the type of feedback that is provided in response to FSB.

Third, the relationship between uncertainty and FSB was negative, whereas the relationship between role ambiguity and FSB was virtually nonexistent. These findings seem contradictory to one of the main assumptions that employees use FSB as a strategy to reduce uncertainty. As noted by Morrison (1995: 352), "In fact [various works] are best understood as reflecting the important informational role that feedback has in reducing uncertainty. . . . This is the dominant motive behind feedback-seeking behavior."

Fourth, the lack of a strong relationship between overall FSB and performance emerged as one of the striking findings of the current state of the literature as provided by this meta-analysis. This is a problematic finding for the feedback-seeking literature in light of the underlying assumption that feedback seeking is an effective strategy to enhance one's own performance and attain work goals (e.g., Renn & Fedor, 2001). One explanation for this finding might be related to the inquiry versus monitoring distinction. We found a differential relationship between inquiry and monitoring and performance. From a practical perspective, this might be a crucial issue. If only inquiry leads to notable increases in job performance, organizations might want to develop new strategies that are focused specifically on the encouragement of inquiry instead of monitoring.

A secondary aim of this study was to evaluate the nature of the FSB construct and its dimensionality on the basis of the empirical research that has taken place since its inception in the mid-1980s. The present meta-analysis offers some support for the usefulness of separating FSB measures in inquiry and monitoring dimensions. Our results show that inquiry and monitoring correlate at  $\rho = .52$  after correlating for unreliability, indicating that the two dimensions are not interchangeable. While power to test for differential correlations with various antecedents and outcomes is low, we do find significantly different relationships between inquiry and monitoring with perceptions of the cost of feedback seeking and with job performance. Thus, the two dimensions of FSB do not seem to be equivalent indicators of FSB.

This study's results regarding the nature of FSB have important implications. From a theoretical perspective, our results suggest that FSB should not be conceptualized as a latent or reflective construct, but rather as an aggregate/formative model wherein the two dimensions of the construct can be algebraically amalgamated into an overall representation of the construct. Until now, FSB had largely remained unspecified as a multidimensional construct, as few researchers explicitly dealt with the question of how the specific subdimensions related to the overall construct. From a research perspective, our findings imply that in future research the two FSB dimensions should probably not be viewed as indicators of the same underlying construct. So, ideally we recommend that researchers measure both dimensions of FSB in their studies. Another viable strategy might be to focus on one specific dimension of FSB and to draw conclusions regarding this dimension only. In recent years, the field seems to be moving in line with this last recommendation as feedback-seeking research has extensively focused on inquiry as the focal variable, thereby neglecting feedback monitoring to some extent (e.g., Dahling, Chau, & O'Malley, 2012; Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010).

## *Directions for Future Research*

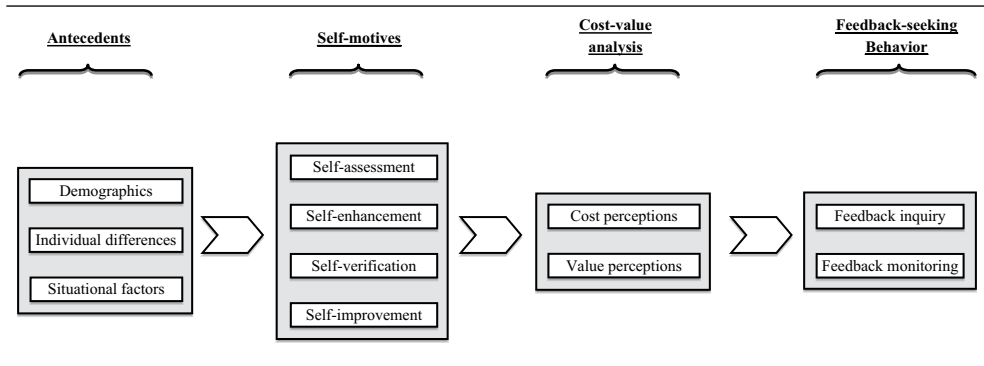
Apart from the fact that a meta-analytic review of 30 years of feedback-seeking research sheds a picture of the current status of the domain, it also permits identifying gaps in our current knowledge and to put forth a research agenda for the future. We organized this agenda for future research along three broad themes. For each of these themes, we provided a heuristic model to inspire and guide future research endeavors. These models should, of course, not be seen as separate testable models, but rather as connected, guiding frameworks to organize interrelated research questions.

### *A Self-Motives Framework for Systematic Integration*

The small *ks* for some antecedents suggest that in the feedback-seeking research domain little attention has been paid to knowledge replication and integration. Given this current lack of integration in the literature, a more comprehensive test of a feedback-seeking theory, beyond the inquiry versus monitoring moderator, was not feasible in this article. We believe, however, that the mere observation of such a lack of integration is a valuable outcome of the current meta-analysis in itself. Thus, our observation that the FSB literature is somewhat fragmented should, on one hand, caution researchers and practitioners to not draw overly strong conclusions just yet and, on the other hand, encourage researchers to adopt a more systematic research effort in future research to map the antecedents of FSB and its tactics. Along these lines, several FSB scholars have positioned that the key avenue to understanding how individual differences and contextual factors affect feedback-seeking strategies is uncovering the underlying motivational dynamics (Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison, 2002). While different feedback-seeking motives have been proposed to do this (Ashford et al., 2003; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002), we believe that a self-motives framework (Anseel et al., 2007) might be especially fruitful to integrating previous findings and guide future research regarding antecedents of feedback inquiry and monitoring as this theoretical framework has proved to be particularly helpful in guiding broader self-evaluation research in social psychology. As shown in Figure 1, we suggest that future research should systematically examine how individual and situational antecedents interact to activate four basic self-motives (for an overview, see Sedikides & Strube, 1997) and how the interplay of these self-motives predicts feedback-seeking decisions.

This framework has the advantage that it will allow integration of FSB findings with insight from other domains. Our initial collection of studies yielded an extensive number of feedback-seeking studies in clinical, developmental, and social psychology typically building on the self-motives framework. Although the majority of these studies have typically conceptualized feedback seeking more as preferences or choices for different types of available feedback without studying the actual feedback-seeking act (e.g., Kwang & Swann, 2010), these studies do provide excellent insight into what types of feedback individuals prefer under what conditions and the mechanisms that explain these choices. Given the relatively limited focus to date on what type of feedback employees prefer, an integration of

**Figure 1**  
**A Self-Motives Framework for Systematic Integration**



these domains may significantly advance our understanding of the dynamics of the feedback-seeking process.

A systematic effort to examine how antecedents relate to feedback-seeking decisions is also important to clearly specify how the subdimensions of inquiry and monitoring are related to overall FSB. The current meta-analysis suggests that a *latent/reflective model* is probably not the best representation of the relations between the FSB construct and its dimensions. Future research should further test the accuracy of the *aggregate/formative model* as our coding of studies revealed that only a modest subset of the studies included measured inquiry and monitoring separately. This prevented us from reliably testing differential relationships between inquiry and monitoring for antecedents such as external feedback propensity, feedback orientation, learning goal orientation, performance goal orientation, positive and negative feedback, and transformational leadership. Clearly, these are key gaps in our current knowledge that are in dire need of research. It follows that the current meta-analysis is definitely not the last word. It offers information that can support future development of a full theoretical model that can be tested only when much more data become available.

#### *A Process Model of the Feedback-Seeking Episode*

As a second overarching theme for future research, we posit that future research needs to adopt a process perspective that takes a detailed look at how supervisors (or other feedback sources) respond to the feedback-seeking attempts of subordinates. One of the most basic but untested assumptions underlying the FSB–performance relationship is that employees indeed receive useful feedback in response to their inquiry and use this information to improve their performance. The current meta-analysis revealed, however, that virtually no studies have examined the intermediate feedback response of the feedback source. It might be that some FSB strategies result in no response or a maladaptive response by supervisors. Therefore, future research needs to examine how supervisors interpret the feedback-seeking

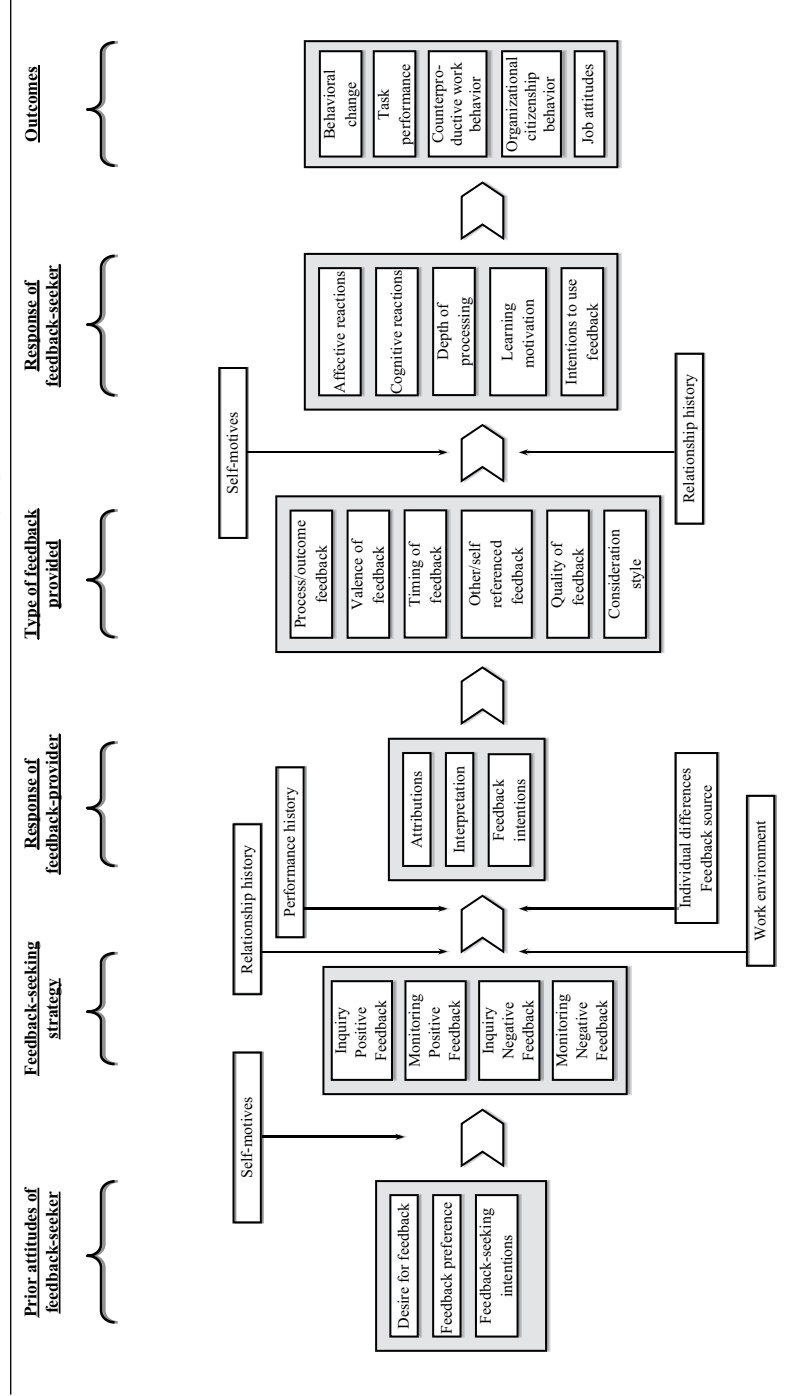
acts of their subordinates and how this interpretation leads to different feedback-giving responses. For instance, it might be that supervisors attribute additional feedback seeking after positive feedback as an impression management strategy on the part of the feedback seeker (e.g., De Stobbeleir, Ashford, & de Luque, 2010) and therefore respond with less useful or diagnostic feedback. As such feedback will be less instrumental for improving performance, this type of FSB might not improve job performance. Thus, as depicted in Figure 2, the question as to whether FSB will affect performance seems likely to depend on factors such as what feedback-seeking attempts signal to the supervisor, how the feedback-seeking act is subsequently interpreted and responded to, and the type of feedback that is provided to the feedback seeker in the end. Clearly, to understand in detail under what conditions FSB might or might not lead to increased performance, future research needs to document the intermediate processes (i.e., FSB motives, FSB strategy, supervisor interpretation, supervisor response, type of feedback) that link FSB to performance.

Furthermore, apart from the responses of the supervisor, FSB research has remained surprisingly silent about the cognitive processing of the feedback seeker when receiving feedback. Previous studies seem to have treated the feedback seeker as a black box and implicitly assumed that feedback should automatically lead to performance increments. However, feedback research shows that feedback needs to be perceived accurately and to be cognitively accepted for performance to be affected (e.g., Kinicki et al., 2004). Furthermore, the effectiveness of feedback also depends on the depth of processing by the feedback recipient (e.g., Anseel, Lievens, & Schollaert, 2009). Deeper cognitive processing may be related to a better organization of feedback information and integration in long-term memory, making it easier to apply feedback in subsequent tasks. In contrast, feedback that is seen as inaccurate or is superficially processed by the feedback seeker might have no lasting effects and might thus explain why feedback seeking sometimes does not result in performance improvement. Thus, as indicated in the process model of the feedback-seeking episode, research should push the envelope further and take a closer look at the feedback seeker's cognitive processing of feedback, which should provide us more insight into how and when feedback seeking leads to performance improvement.

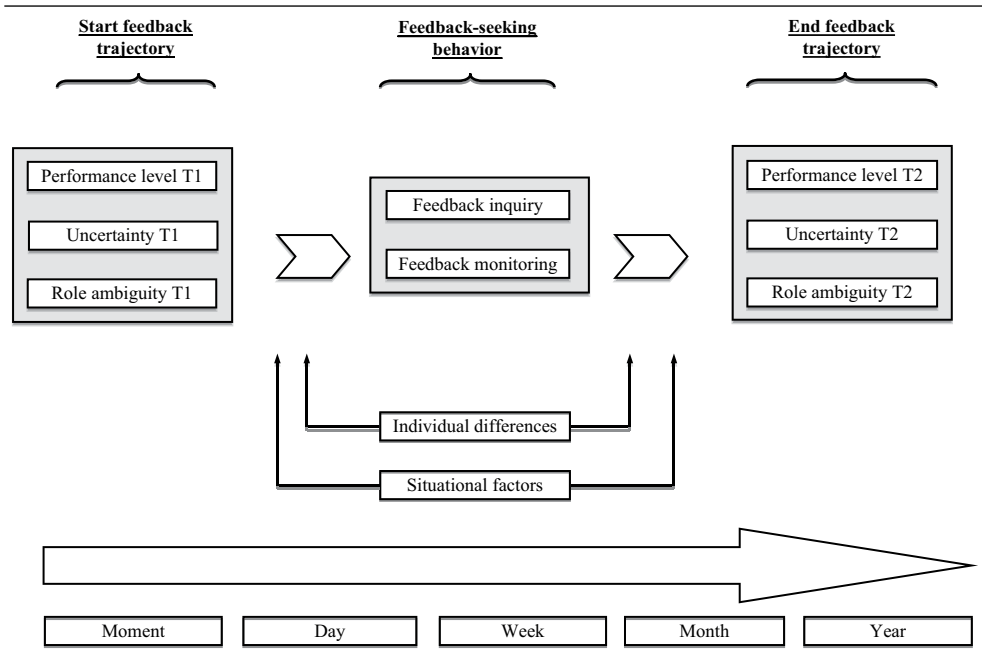
An examination of such a process model should also involve a more extensive conceptualization of actual feedback-seeking decisions. Feedback-seeking research has largely confined itself to the two feedback-seeking dimensions that were originally proposed by Ashford and Cummings (1983). Only recently have researchers started to pay attention to other types of feedback seeking such as positive and negative seeking of feedback. To date, it is not clear whether these feedback-seeking efforts constitute separate dimensions or how they should be conceptualized. One option might be to cross these types of feedback with the two feedback-seeking tactics to obtain a 2 by 2 model of FSB. Similarly, a considerable number of studies have examined feedback-seeking intentions or feedback-seeking preferences without studying the subsequent behavioral component of FSB. While such studies are informative to increase our insight in the desire for feedback, it prevents us from testing a more elaborate process model of FSB such as the one proposed by Levy et al. (1995). Future research may integrate and test measures of feedback-seeking desire and actual decisions and behavior into a larger cost-benefit model.



**Figure 2**  
**A Process Model of the Feedback-Seeking Episode**



**Figure 3**  
**A Dynamic Reciprocal Model of Feedback-Seeking Behavior**



Finally, a process perspective on the feedback-seeking process should also involve research efforts to better delineate how FSB is related to other proactive strategies such as information seeking, help seeking, and initiative taking. A logical next question is how these different behaviors should be conceptualized in relation to the overall construct of proactive behavior and thus how proactive behavior should best be represented as a multidimensional construct.

*A Dynamic, Reciprocal Model of FSB*

Finally, as a third broad research avenue, we suggest that future research should benefit from taking the iterative nature of feedback into account to better study the effects of FSB on performance. Longitudinal studies that examine the dynamics between antecedents such as uncertainty and performance on one hand and FSB on the other hand are sorely needed. Virtually no studies have examined the causal and reciprocal relationships between those antecedents and feedback-seeking tactics. Given the limited number of longitudinal studies in our data set, we were unable to conduct a stringent test of the key assumption that FSB tactics are an instrumental strategy for improving performance. It is plausible that the outcomes of the feedback gained from the act of seeking become the predictors of the next feedback-seeking act as depicted in the reciprocal model in Figure 3.

Hence, poor job performance might be an antecedent of more frequent feedback seeking, which eventually might lead to an increase in performance. The same logic applies for some of the other counterintuitive findings above. For instance, the inconclusive results for uncertainty and role ambiguity might very well result from the fact that uncertainty as an antecedent leads to increased feedback seeking, which in turn leads to a strong decrease in uncertainty as an outcome. For reasons of brevity, in Figure 3 we included only those antecedents/consequences for which counterintuitive findings were obtained in the current meta-analysis, but several other variables that are traditionally treated as antecedents may be valuable candidates in a reciprocal model (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, state goal orientation).

Longitudinal and experience-sampling studies of feedback seeking over time would also allow us to begin to parcel out between-person and within-person effects in feedback seeking. The approach taken by the present meta-analysis and to our knowledge by the feedback-seeking field at large has generally measured typical (or trait) levels of feedback seeking and looked at situational and personal antecedents to these behaviors. However, given that our study found a number of situational variables related to feedback seeking (which are presumably not static) and variables related to FSB have been found to show both between- and within-individual variance (e.g., goal orientation; Yeo, Loft, Xiao, & Kiewitz, 2009), it seems reasonable that there may be both trait- and state-like components to FSB. Furthermore, it may be the case that relationships differ in direction or magnitude (or both) when moving from a between-person to a within-person level of analysis (e.g., Chen, Bliese, & Mathieu, 2005). For example, while we did not find relationships between overall FSB and performance at the between-persons level of analysis, that does not preclude us from finding such a relationship at a within-person level of analysis (i.e., an individual performs better than he or she usually does when he or she seeks more frequent feedback than is typical). Future research should seek to investigate multilevel questions regarding feedback seeking, including, but not limited to, these: What proportion of variance in FSB is between individuals versus within individuals? Are the determinants of trait (or typical) FSB the same or different from the determinants of momentary (or within-person) FSB? Are the magnitude and direction of relationships between and within persons similar or different?

## **Conclusion**

The present meta-analysis provides the first comprehensive picture to date about the nexus of FSB. By meta-analytically addressing relationships between FSB and its predictors and outcomes, we provided more insight regarding previously inconsistent findings and identified new issues for future research. Our results further suggest that the two FSB methods (inquiry and monitoring) are empirically distinct. Generally, we believe this quantitative review provides the groundwork for further advancing the FSB domain, both theoretically and empirically. Future research may benefit from (a) a systematic and integrative effort examining antecedents of both feedback-seeking strategies on the basis of a self-motives framework, (b) adopting a process perspective of feedback-seeking interactions, and (c) taking the iterative nature of feedback into account.

## Notes

1. From a practical perspective, it is important to consider the malleability of these individual differences variables. Although there is empirical evidence supporting the interindividual stability of each of these individual differences variables, they are also malleable to a certain extent, which opens up opportunities for interventions for organizations that aim to increase the frequency of feedback-seeking behavior (FSB). For instance, research on goal orientations suggests that situational inducements may lead employees to adopt specific goal orientations (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Similarly, intervention programs to increase self-efficacy and self-esteem are well established (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007).

2. Empirical evidence that factor analyses of feedback-seeking tactics measures yield a clear and interpretable two-factor solution might also be indicative of the distinctiveness of the two tactics. However, the results of such analyses are dependent on the measures that are being used. In addition, we know of no studies that have addressed the monitoring-inquiry distinction by testing it against a composite FSB construct using confirmatory factor analyses.

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