A SELF-DETERMINATION MODEL OF FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIOR IN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The current paper presents a theoretical framework on feedback-seeking behavior in organizations. Based upon the model, which is derived from self-determination theory, we summarize and systematize two decades of research on feedback-seeking behavior and we identify potentially fruitful avenues for further research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of giving feedback to employees is well recognized in management sciences (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979; Larson, 1989; Pearce & Porter, 1986). Traditionally, feedback literature has mainly been focusing on giving feedback as a part of the formal appraisal process. However, since the pioneering work of Ashford and Cummings (1983), many scholars have argued that the most important feedback processes, i.e. the informal feedback processes, have largely been neglected in previous research. Based on this observation, Ashford and Cummings (1983) introduced the concept of feedback-seeking behavior in management literature, arguing that not only feedback *giving* is an important organizational resource, but that active feedback-seeking, initiated by employees themselves, is just as valuable for organizations, since it enables employees to direct their own work behaviors (Anseel & Lievens, in press; Ashford, Blatt & VandeWalle, 2003; VandeWalle, Cron & Slocum, 2001). In literature, feedback-seeking behavior, is defined as "*the conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states*" (Ashford, 1986).

Reasons for the recent shift in interest from feedback giving and receiving towards a focus on active feedback seeking, can be found in a number of developments that have changed the feedback environment drastically (Levy, Albright, Cawley & Williams, 1995; Bandura, 2001; Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002). A complex set of pressures including globalization, technological developments and intensified competition have forced organizations to be proactively innovative and adaptable in order to survive (Bandura, 2002; Bandura & Locke, 2003). Given these contingencies, an increasing number of employees lack clear task objectives and role expectations (Brown, Ganesan & Challagalla, 2001; Fletcher, 2001), which makes it difficult to provide performance feedback to these employees.

Given this new feedback reality, employees need to take responsibility of their own learning and development and seek feedback on issues that go beyond the information delivered by traditional feedback systems (London & Smither, 1999). Therefore, academics and practitioners have embraced a proactive perspective on feedback, arguing that feedback seeking implies an ongoing exchange of feedback and hence serves as an important complement of these traditional feedback systems (Tsui & Ashford, 1994; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron & Slocum, 1999).

The recognition of feedback-seeking behavior as an important employee resource and as an organizational concern has resulted in a considerable body of research in this area. Empirical work has contributed to our understanding of the construct and its different facets (e.g. Ashford et al., 2003; VandeWalle, 2003). However, research on the **antecedents** of feedback-seeking shows two important limitations. First, systematic and integrative research towards the individual antecedents and motives underlying feedback-seeking behavior is scarce and has resulted in mixed research findings (Madzar, 1995). Second, although several authors have stressed the importance of the feedback context as an antecedent of feedback seeking, empirical evidence is lacking (Ashford et al., 2003; Williams, Miller, Steelman & Levy, 1999; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla & Brown, 2000). Based on these shortcomings, *this paper aims at presenting a theoretical framework, which allows us to extend our understanding of the antecedents of feedback seeking.*

In addition, also the **outcomes** of feedback-seeking behavior have been the subject of conceptual and empirical work (e.g. Ashord, 1986; Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Renn & Fedor, 2001). As to date, research has primarily included employee performance as an outcome variable, but this has lead to inconsistent research results (Anseel & Lievens, 2002; Ashford et al., 2003). Responding to the contradictory results, several authors argue that feedback-seeking behavior is likely to affect employee performance but that further research is needed to understand the feedback seeking – employee performance relationship. Clarifying this relationship is not only relevant from a feedback seeking perspective. Also in people performance literature, the role of feedback (e.g. Locke & Latham, 1990) and proactive feedback seeking (e.g. Bandura & Locke, 2003) has been repeatedly stipulated. *"When people are given goals, they try to track their progress in relation to them by looking for feedback. Tracking one's own progress is an essential way to improve performance"* (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p. 89). Following these authors, we can conclude that theories on feedback seeking are a relevant perspective to improve our understanding of employee performance. *It is therefore our second objective to develop a conceptual model, which helps us to clarify the impact of feedback-seeking behavior on employee performance.*

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As indicated, both theorists and practitioners consider an ongoing exchange of performance information as a prerequisite for ongoing performance improvement within organizations. However, despite the importance attributed to individual feedback-seeking behavior in this ongoing feedback exchange process, little *systematic* research has been conducted towards its antecedents and consequences (Ashford et al., 2003). Considering the current state of the research, we formulated two general research objectives, which have been broken down into four specific research questions as presented below.

Our first research objective addresses the **antecedents** of feedback-seeking behavior. From the literature, two general categories of antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior can be derived, i.e. individual antecedents and contextual antecedents (VandeWalle, 2003).

First, research towards the *individual antecedents* of feedback seeking has been dominated by studies towards the influence of personality characteristics, such as goal orientation, tolerance for ambiguity and self-esteem (Ashford et al., 2003). Although this stream of research has provided important insights, research results have been inconsistent and additional research is required (Anseel & Lievens, in press). In this regard, several authors suggest that much could be gained from a systematic assessment of the relative impact of these personality variables on the different facets of feedback-seeking behavior (e.g. Callister, Kramer & Turban, 1999). Others have suggested that research needs to focus on the central role of the three motives that lie at the heart of feedback-seeking behavior: (1) the instrumental motive; (2) the ego defense and enhancement motive; and (3) the image defense and enhancement motive (Ashford et al., 2003; Bernichon, Cook & Brown, 2003; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Tuckey et al., 2002). Research in this area has evidenced that individuals do not only seek feedback to obtain information, but that they also seek feedback to protect their egos and to enhance the image that others hold of them and that this affects different facets of feedback seeking (e.g. topic) (Ashford et al., 2003).

Second, further research is required towards the *contextual antecedents* of feedback seeking. From a theoretical perspective, two key facets of the feedback context are believed to be significant: (1) the relational nature of the feedback context as feedback-seeking involves an exchange process; and (2) the goal setting patterns that prevail in the feedback context (Ashford et al., 2003; Gupta et al., 1999; Madzar, 1995).

However, empirical evidence relating context variables to feedback-seeking behavior is scarce and scholars suggest that more theoretical and empirical work needs to be done to understand the contextual dynamics underlying feedback-seeking behavior (Ashford et al., 2003; Gupta, Govindarajan, & Malhorta, 1999; Madzar, 2001).

Based on these fruitful paths for further research concerning the antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior, our first research question addresses the individual and contextual antecedents critical for feedback seeking.

>*Research question 1a:* What are the effects of individual variables on feedback-seeking behavior?
>
>*Research question 1b:* What is the impact of contextual characteristics on feedback-seeking behavior?

Our second research objective concerns the **outcomes** of feedback-seeking behavior. The outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior in terms of employee performance have been studied extensively. A number of studies have provided evidence for a positive impact on performance (e.g. Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Morrison & Weldon, 1990), whereas others found no relation (e.g. Ang, Cummings, Straub & Early, 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996; Edwards, 1995; Klich & Feldman, 1992; Moon & Levy, 2000) or even a negative relationship (Brown et al., 2001; Fedor, Rensvold & Adams, 1992). In our review of the literature, we already identified a number of possible reasons for the existence of these inconsistencies, but further research is required to clarify the impact of feedback-seeking behavior on employee performance. Our second research question addresses this relationship.

>*Research question 2a:* What are the effects of feedback-seeking behavior on employee performance?

Furthermore, we agree with the emerging literature suggesting that additional research is needed to assess the moderating mechanisms that influence the feedback seeking - performance relationship (Anseel & Lievens, 2002; Ashford et al., 2003).

>*Research question 2b:* Which mechanisms moderate the feedback-seeking behavior - employee performance relationship?

In order to address these research questions, we developed a conceptual model based upon self-determination theory. Before we elaborate on the theoretical framework and the variables included in our model, we define and conceptualize feedback-seeking behavior as a construct.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

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3. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIOR IN ORGANIZATIONS

The concept of feedback-seeking behavior was first introduced by Ashford and Cummings (1983) and refers to the "*active monitoring and inquiry of information concerning job performance*". Ashford (1986) broadened this definition beyond its focus on job performance towards "*the conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states*". Within contemporary literature on feedback-seeking behavior, the majority of scholars adopt this definition of feedback-seeking behavior (e.g. Anseel & Lievens, 2002; Brutus & Cabrera, 2004; Farr, Ringseis & Unckles, 1999; VandeWalle, 2003).

Existing theoretical and empirical work on the **construct** of feedback-seeking reveals that it is best conceived as a **multi-faceted construct,** consisting of five elements, each of them conceptualizing a different aspect of feedback-seeking: (1) frequency; (2) strategy; (3) source; (4) timing; and (5) topic (Ashford et al., 2003; VandeWalle, 2003).

First, the **frequency** of feedback seeking refers to how often individuals engage in feedback seeking. Most research has focused on this facet of feedback-seeking behavior (Ang & Cummings, 1994; Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Bennet & Herrold, 1990; Brett, Feldman & Weingart, 1990; Kuchinke, 2000). Second, the **strategy** of feedback seeking represents the various tactics that individuals employ when seeking for feedback. One can seek for feedback by directly asking others for an evaluation or perception of their behavior, i.e. *inquiry*, or one can seek for feedback by observing various situational cues in the environment, i.e. *monitoring* (Ashford, 1993; Callister et al., 1999; Gupta et al., 1999).

The third facet concentrates on the **sources** from which individuals seek feedback. Feedback can be sought from members of the individual's role set (e.g. immediate supervisor, coworkers or subordinates), other organizational sources and extra-organizational sources (e.g. clients) (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995). A fourth facet is the **timing** of feedback-seeking and refers to the length of the time gap between the occurrence of an event (e.g. task performance) and the seeking of feedback specific to that event (Larson, 1989; Moon & Levy, 2000; Morrison & Bies, 1991; VandeWalle, 2003). A final facet considers the **topic** on which individuals seek feedback. One can seek for positive versus negative feedback (Ashford et al., 2003; Ashford & Tsui, 1991) or for process versus outcome feedback (e.g. Madzar, 2001).

4. A SELF-DETERMINATION MODEL ON THE ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

For two decades, researchers have tried to further our understanding of the nature and antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior and its impact on a number of outcomes. However, as indicated, little *systematic* models have been developed to guide research towards its antecedents and consequences.

The conceptual model we developed draws on **self-determination theory**, which is an integrative theory of human motivation that is concerned with the development and functioning of people within *social contexts* (Deci & Ryan, 1985a). In summary, self-determination theory hypothesizes that people have a natural predisposition to be agentic, proactive and self-determining organisms that strive for personal development and positive functioning (Ryan, Connell and Deci, 1985). However, research has indicated that people differ in the extent to which they demonstrate this proactivity and agency (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1985a). According to the theory, these within- and between-person differences in the demonstration of self-determination and proactive behaviors are mainly a function of contextual and interpersonal factors, although it is recognized that individual characteristics are a determining factor as well.

Bearing on the proactive nature of feedback-seeking behavior and existing research evidence, we consider self-determination theory as a promising framework for empirical research that addresses the previously described research questions regarding feedback seeking in organizations.

First, adopting a self-determination perspective on feedback-seeking behavior would not only lead to the consideration of additional **individual factors** in relation to feedback-seeking behavior, but it would allow us to shed new light on conflicting research results concerning the individual antecedents of feedback seeking by the consideration of additional correlates. For example, given the importance that self-determination theory attaches to the underlying motives of individual behavior and the empirical evidence in feedback-seeking literature, supporting this vision, insights from self-determination theory could help us to further develop research concerning the three feedback-seeking motives (cf. infra).

Second, given the relative lack of research towards the **contextual antecedents** of feedback-seeking behavior (Ashford et al., 2003) and bearing on empirical evidence supporting self-determination theory in other research domains, we suggest that feedback-seeking literature would benefit from adopting a self-determination perspective, because it would allow us to select the most relevant contextual factors.

Finally, we consider self-determination theory as a relevant framework for studying the **outcomes** of feedback-seeking behavior. From a self-determination perspective, feedback-seeking behavior can be conceived as an active process that functions optimally when employees' motivations are autonomous for seeking feedback about their work performance. Based on this viewpoint, feedback-seeking behavior enacted for impression management reasons or ego defense or enhancement reasons may lead to different outcomes than feedback-seeking behaviors enacted for instrumental reasons.

Based on the above arguments, we can conclude that adopting a self-determination perspective in feedback-seeking literature would not only offer new research directions, but would also allow us to organize what we already know from previous research.

In the following paragraphs, we elaborate into more detail on self-determination theory and on each of the constructs included in our model and we derive hypotheses regarding the proposed relationships. Through the development of this conceptual framework, we aim to clarify the antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior and investigate its impact on employee performance.

4.1. Feedback-seeking behavior

The central concept in our model is feedback-seeking behavior in organizations, as it was described by Ashford (1986). Although the theoretical claim about the relevance of studying multiple facets of feedback-seeking behavior has been supported by several studies (e.g. Tsui & Ashford, 1991; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle et al., 2000),

researchers often operationalize only one facet of feedback seeking, i.e. the frequency of seeking. This has proved to be a deficient operationalization of the concept (VandeWalle, 2003). In accordance with Ashford et al. (2003) and VandeWalle (2003), we therefore conceive feedback-seeking behavior as a multi-faceted construct, consisting of the five previously discussed facets: frequency of feedback seeking, strategy of feedback seeking, source of feedback seeking, timing of feedback seeking and the topic of seeking.

Although research on the correlates of these distinct facets of feedback-seeking behavior is relatively scarce, the few studies that have considered feedback-seeking behavior as a multi-faceted construct (e.g. Gupta et al., 1999; Ashford & Tsui, 1991), have found evidence for *differential relationships* between the *different facets* of feedback-seeking behavior and relevant antecedents and consequences. For example, research has indicated that the various strategies of feedback seeking are differentially related to employee performance (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Furthermore, regarding the differential impact of antecedents, Gupta et al. (1999) found that role conflict differentially influences how frequently the various feedback-seeking strategies are used. However, as discussed, research in this area remains underdeveloped and there is still much to be learned on the antecedents and consequences of the distinguished facets of feedback-seeking behavior. Therefore, we will not formulate hypotheses for each separate facet and all correlates under investigation in this study. In contrast, we state the following two general hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1: The five facets of feedback-seeking behavior will be differentially influenced by the antecedent variables.*
> *Hypothesis 2: The five facets of feedback-seeking behavior will differentially impact employee performance..*

We are aware that these hypotheses are stated at a very general level. Nevertheless, when relevant and warranted from a theoretical or empirical perspective, we have also formulated more explicit hypotheses concerning specific relationships that can be expected between specific facets of feedback-seeking behavior and the antecedent and outcome variables included in our model (cf. infra).

4.2 Self determination theory as a macro-theory of feedback-seeking behavior

Building on the relevance of the theoretical assumptions underlying self-determination theory for feedback-seeking behavior on the one hand and on the empirical evidence supporting the theory in related research domains on the other, we were able to derive relevant hypotheses concerning feedback-seeking behavior from our conceptual model. In the below paragraphs, the variables and hypotheses included in our model are presented.

4.2.1 Antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior

The first objective of our study is to extend our knowledge of the antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior. Based on the shortcomings previously described, we aim to build and test a model that (1) clarifies the impact of individual antecedents of feedback seeking (research question 1a); and (2) extends our understanding of the contextual antecedents of feedback seeking (research question 1b).

4.2.1.1 Individual antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior

Research question 1a addresses the individual antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior. In the following paragraphs, we subsequently elaborate on four central concepts as potential relevant individual antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior: (1) feedback-seeking motives; (2) causality orientations; (3) work value orientations; and (4) perceived need satisfaction at work.

Feedback-seeking motives as a central mediator

Central in self-determination theory is the distinction it makes between autonomous motives and controlled motives for enacting behaviors. *Autonomy* involves acting with a sense of choice and psychological freedom, whereas *controlled motivation* involves acting with a sense of obligation or a sense of being forced to engage in certain behaviors (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This is a quite unique conceptualization of motivation. Whereas the majority of theories on motivation treat motivation as a unitary concept, variable in amount (i.e. the level of motivation), self-determination theory also focuses on the *type* of motivation (i.e. the degree to which it is autonomous versus controlled), stating that different types of motives will lead to very different outcomes. More specifically, autonomous motives imply behavioral regulation by forces that are integrated to the self (i.e. self-concordant) and a tendency to de-emphasize the significance of others' evaluations (Deci & Ryan, 1995), whereas controlled motives imply being directed by forces that are not fully integrated by the self. As we already

described, feedback-seeking research has distinguished three types of motives: (1) the instrumental motive; (2) the ego defense and enhancement motive; and (3) the image defense and enhancement motive (Ashford et al., 2003; Bernichon, Cook & Brown, 2003; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). In literature, it is implicitly assumed that these feedback-seeking motives will affect the various facets of feedback seeking. For example, the topic on which one seeks feedback might vary depending on the feedback-seeking motives. Furthermore, scholars acknowledge that feedback-seeking behavior enacted for ego concern or impression management reasons will are associated with very different outcomes than feedback-seeking behaviors enacted for instrumental reasons, although a strong theoretical basis to guide research in this area has been lacking (Morrison, 1993; Tuckey et al., 2002). Bearing on the suggestions of Gagné and Deci (2005) concerning the relevance of applying self-determination theory to investigate behaviors that entail diverse motives, we believe that the distinction between autonomous and controlled motives for behavior offers a relevant framework to test these assumptions in an integrated way. We believe the time is ripe to expand the current conception of feedback-seeking motives in favor of an in-depth and theory-driven approach. More specifically, as suggested by Gagné and Deci (2005), we can expect that impression management motives and ego enhancement or protection motives are in fact examples of controlled motives and that the instrumental motive is an example of autonomous motivation. Important to note is that we also expect feedback-seeking behavior enacted for ego concern reasons to be controlled behavior, as it represents behavior by contingent self-esteem, i.e. intrapersonal control (Ryan & Deci, 2000): the behavior is not endorsed by external sources, but by a sense of internal obligation. Not only in self-determination theory (e.g. Bono & Judge, 2003; Sheldon et al., 2003) but also in feedback-seeking literature there are empirical indications that it makes sense to consider ego concerns and impression management motives as examples of controlled motivation. For example, research by Tuckey et al. (2002) demonstrated that the desire for useful information was associated with increased feedback seeking, whereas both the desire to protect one's ego and impression management motives were associated with lower levels of feedback seeking. Moreover, in this study, which was the first to measure the various feedback-seeking motives simultaneously, the ego protection and defensive impression management motive were highly correlated, which might be an indication in favor of distinguishing between autonomous and controlled motives for feedback-seeking behavior. Based upon these theoretical and empirical observations, we will adopt this reconceptualization of the feedback-seeking motives proposed by self-determination theory and asses whether this is indeed justified. Consistent

with the work of Tuckey et al. (2002) and Anseel and Lievens (in press), we will consider the feedback-seeking motives as a central mediator between the individual and contextual variables on the one hand and feedback-seeking behavior on the other.

Several studies have revealed the effects of autonomous and controlled motivation on various outcomes. For example, research by Vansteenkiste and his colleagues has revealed that autonomous motivation related positively to various learning-related outcomes, such as depth of processing, test performance and persistence (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon & Deci, 2004). Other studies found that autonomous (versus controlled) motivation is related to greater well-being (Sheldon et al., in press) and stronger persistence in job search behavior (Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte & Deci, 2004). On the other hand, research in feedback-seeking literature revealed that the feedback-seeking motives affect the facets of feedback seeking, for example the topic on which one seeks feedback.

More specifically, we formulate the following general hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Autonomous and controlled feedback-seeking motives will differentially affect the facets of feedback seeking behavior

Based upon our review of literature a number of specific relationships between the feedback-seeking motives and specific facets (or combinations of facets) of feedback seeking can be expected.

First, research suggests that the feedback-seeking motives affect the *frequency* of feedback seeking. For example, the importance of *impression management concerns* has been indicated by various studies investigating the impact of the presence of an audience (e.g. Ashford and Northcraft, 1992). For example, research revealed that the presence of an audience is associated with decreased inquiry because of the perceived impression management costs (Ashford and Northcraft, 1992). In line with these results, Ang et al. (1993) found that individuals seek feedback more frequently in computer-mediated and computer-generated environments (i.e. monitoring) than in face-to-face environments (i.e. inquiry), because computer environments are more anonymous and involve less image costs. Furthermore, Tuckey et al. (2002) found that ego concerns and impression management motives resulted in decreased feedback inquiry, whereas instrumental motives were positively related to the frequency of seeking. In contrast, feedback inquiry has been found to increase when the feedback source is perceived as supportive (e.g. VandeWalle et al., 2000) and when the source's reactions on feedback-seeking behavior are positive (Thomas & Williams, 1999).

These findings suggest that the motives that underlie feedback-seeking are likely to affect the frequency of feedback seeking through the strategies of inquiry and monitoring. Bearing on these findings and on empirical evidence supporting self-determination's conceptualization of motives (i.e. autonomous versus controlled motives), we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: *Autonomous motives for feedback seeking will relate positively to the frequency of feedback inquiry and monitoring.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Controlled motives for feedback seeking will relate negatively to the frequency of feedback inquiry, but will not affect feedback monitoring.*

Second, the feedback-seeking motives are also expected to affect the decisions that individuals make about the *topic* on which to seek feedback. For instance, Bernichon et al. (2003) provided evidence that individuals scoring high on self esteem, sought self-verifying feedback regardless of whether it was positive or negative, whereas individuals with low self-esteem were more likely to seek positive (or self-enhancing) feedback. Furthermore, theory suggests that image concerns may drive individuals to seek positive feedback even if it is not self-verifying (Morrison and Bies, 1991). Based upon these empirical and theoretical arguments, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3c: *Autonomous motives for feedback seeking will relate positively to seeking self-verifying feedback*

Hypothesis 3d: *Controlled motives for feedback seeking will relate positively to seeking positive feedback*

Next, we can expect that decisions regarding the *source* from which to seek feedback are likely to depend on the *motives* that underlie feedback seeking. For example, research has revealed in organizational settings, supervisors are the most important sources of feedback based on their expertise and reward power (Ashford et al., 2003). However, some authors suggest that in many cases, other sources, such as for example peers, might possess more expertise than supervisors concerning particular aspects of the attainment of goals and that there might be higher instrumental value for individuals to not only seek feedback from their supervisors but also from these other sources (Morrison, 1993). Based on these suggestions, we might expect that individuals who have instrumental (or autonomous) reasons to seek feedback, will seek feedback from various sources instead of only from their supervisor. On

the other hand, it is also likely that seeking feedback from a wider variety of sources might involve higher impression management costs (Tuckey et al., 2002). Based on these observations, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3e:Autonomous motives for feedback seeking will result in the consultation of more various sources, whereas controlled motives for feedback seeking will result in a focus on the supervisor as a source to seek feedback from.

Finally, we argue that decisions regarding the *timing* of feedback seeking will be influenced by the motives that underlie feedback seeking. In line with Larson's suggestions that people who wish to protect their egos or image tend to delay feedback seeking, whereas individuals who want to obtain information, will tend to seek immediate feedback (Larson, 1989), we expect that controlled and autonomous motives for feedback seeking will differentially affect the timing of feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 3f: Autonomous motives for feedback seeking will relate to immediate feedback seeking after a given performance, whereas controlled motives for feedback seeking will relate to the postponement of feedback seeking after a given performance.

Causality orientations

A second individual variable that is included in our conceptual model are the causality orientations of the feedback seeker, as self-determination theory acknowledges that motives and human behaviors are to some extent influenced by individual dispositions (Deci and Ryan, 1985b). Some people tend to perceive their environment as more autonomy-supportive than others. In self-determination theory, these individual differences are conceptualized as three general causality orientations: (1) autonomy orientations; (2) controlled orientations; and (3) impersonal orientations. Research has indicated that individuals demonstrating an autonomy orientation tend to focus on those aspects within the environment that encourage autonomous motivation, settings that are optimally challenging and provide informational feedback (Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Hodgins, Koestner, & Duncan; 1996). They also tend to exhibit more initiative, seek activities that are interesting and challenging, and take greater responsibility for their own behavior. In contrast, empirical work has revealed that individuals scoring high on controlled orientation tend to focus on rewards, deadlines, structures, ego concerns, and the instructions of others. As a result, they might not take as much initiative and

have a preference for routine-like activities (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). Impersonal oriented individuals tend to believe that attaining desired outcomes is beyond their own power and that achievement is a matter of luck or fate (Hodgins et al., 1996). People high on this orientation tend to feel anxious and ineffective and are likely to have the feeling that they cannot affect outcomes. As a result, these individuals might prefer things to be as they always were, as they have difficulties with coping with changes (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). The concept of causality orientations seems very similar to the concept of *locus of control*. However, it should be noted that both concepts are distinct. Whereas locus of control refers to the beliefs that individuals hold about the internal versus external determinants of *outcomes*, causality orientations refer to beliefs about the determinants of *behavior* (Sheldon, Turban, Brown, Barrick & Judge, 2003). Although there is clearly some overlap, this conceptual difference has also been established empirically (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Sheldon et al., 2003). Given our focus on feedback-seeking *behavior,* we included the concept of causality orientations in our model. However, given the potential overlap, locus of control will serve a control variable. Empirical work has provided evidence for the impact of causality orientations on various behaviors and attitudes, such as self-actualization, type A behavioral patterns (Koestner, Bernieri, & Zuckerman, 1992) and physical exercise (Rose, Markland & Parfitt, 2001). Each of these studies provided evidence for the impact of autonomous orientations on various positive behaviors and outcomes, whereas the effects of controlled and impersonal orientations were detrimental. Based on these studies and bearing on the empirical evidence in feedback-seeking literature concerning the impact of individual characteristics such as goal orientations, we expect that these causality orientations will also be related to feedback-seeking behavior.

> *Hypothesis 4a:*   *The various causality orientations will differentially affect the facets of feedback-seeking behavior*

Both feedback-seeking literature and self-determination theory suggest that the individual motives (i.e. autonomous versus controlled) will mediate the relationship between these causality orientations and various behavioral and feedback seeking. For example, in their model of work motivation, Gagné & Deci (2005) argue that individuals who are high on the autonomous causality orientation tend to be more autonomously motivated, which in turn leads to more optimal functioning.

Also in feedback-seeking literature, the mediating role of the feedback-seeking motives in the relationship between individual antecedents and subsequent feedback-seeking behavior is largely acknowledged (e.g. Anseel & Lievens, in press; Ashford et al., 2003; Tuckey et al., 2002). Based upon these insights, we expect that the feedback-seeking motives will mediate the impact of causality orientations on feedback-seeking behavior.

Hypothesis 4b: *The relationship between causality orientations and feedback-seeking behavior will be mediated by the autonomous versus controlled motives for feedback seeking.*

Work value orientations

Self-determination theory suggests that employees have different work value orientations and that these work value orientations affect various work behaviors and their motives (Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, Niemiec, Soenens & De Witte, in press). Since the 1950's, work values have received considerable attention in organizational psychology (MacNab & Fitzsimmons, 1987). Studies on work values have shown that values play a significant role in individuals' work-related attitudes and behaviors such as job satisfaction and turnover (e.g. Butler, 1983; Greenhaus, Seidel & Marinis, 1983; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Osipow, 1987; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987; Roe & Ester, 1999; Ross, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999; Soh, 2000; Taris & Feij, 2000;). Numerous categorizations of work values relevant for understanding individuals' job choices and behaviors exist (for an overview, see Roe & Ester, 1999). For instance, Ravlin & Meglino (1987) consider achievement, concern, honesty, and fairness as the most salient work values to individuals (see also Judge & Bretz, 1992; Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1991). Ros, Schwartz and Surkiss (1999) on the other hand argue that two main work value orientations exist. Some employees regard their work as a way to further develop themselves, fulfill their personal interests and make significant contributions to society, whereas others mainly focus on financial success, having control and authority and climb up the hierarchical ladder. In examining work value orientations, self-determination theory has mainly elaborated on the work of Ros et al. (1999) and focused on the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic work value orientations. An *intrinsic work value orientation* reflects the employee's focus on development and growth at work and qualitative relationships with colleagues, peers and supervisors, whereas *extrinsic work value orientations* refer to "the traditional pursuit of success by advancing up the organizational hierarchy to achieve prestige, status and high income" (Watts, 1992, p 51; see also Vansteenkiste et al., in press). Research has evidenced

that these work value orientations are related to job experiences (Vansteenkiste et al., in press), job satisfaction (Cheung & Scherling, 1999) and income levels (Nickerson, Schwartz, Diener & Kahneman, 2003). Scholars have also suggested that these work value orientations might be relevant predictors of a whole range of more specific work behaviors, such as citizenship behaviors (e.g. Vansteenkiste et al., in press; Gagné & Deci, 2006). As to date, there has been no attention for the impact of work value orientations on feedback-seeking behavior. However, research regarding the impact of *goal orientations* did provide initial evidence for the impact of the *content* of goals on feedback-seeking behavior. Although work value orientations are broader concepts than goal orientations (Vansteenkiste et al., in press) they also share the similarity that they focus on the *content* of goals. Furthermore, research has indicated that the quality of life and work related goals (intrinsic versus extrinsic goals) are related, but not identical to individual goal orientations in achievement situations (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, Matos & Lacante, 2004). Based upon the above arguments and observations we expect that intrinsic and extrinsic work value orientations will relate to feedback-seeking behavior.

> *Hypothesis 5a: Individual work value orientations will be differentially associated with the various facets of feedback-seeking behavior*

We expect that the impact of these work value orientations will be mediated by the feedback-seeking motives. More specifically, it is suggested in feedback-seeking literature that the feedback-seeking motives are a central mediator in the relationship between various individual antecedents (such as goal orientations) and feedback-seeking behavior (e.g. Tuckey et al., 2002). Also from a self-determination theoretical perspective it makes sense to suggest that work value orientations will be associated with the feedback seeking motives (Vansteenkiste et al., in press). Based upon these insights, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 5b: The relationship between work value orientations and feedback-seeking behavior will be mediated by the autonomous versus controlled motives for feedback seeking.*

4.2.1.2 Contextual variables

So far, we have identified the individual variables that are expected to affect feedback-seeking behavior in response to research question 1a. Research question 1b addresses its contextual antecedents.

One of the central principles in self-determination theory is that the quality of the social context in which individuals function, will affect their motivation, performance, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Within self-determination theory, the quality of these social environments is characterized by the concept of autonomy support versus control. More specifically, the theory posits that autonomy-supportive social contexts tend to facilitate self-determined motivation, optimal development and functioning, whereas controlling contexts tend to impede self-determination. Bearing on insights derived from self-determination theory and based upon the importance attached to the social context in feedback-seeking literature, in the following paragraphs we will identify the manager's interpersonal orientations, work climate and goal framing as potential predictors of feedback-seeking behavior.

Manager's interpersonal orientations: Transformational versus transactional leadership style

First, self-determination theory suggests that in work contexts, managers' **interpersonal orientations** affect employee behavior and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Within the theory, these interpersonal orientations are defined as the extent to which supervisors tend to support the self-determination of their subordinates. Highly autonomy supportive managers tend to listen to their subordinates, involve them in decision-making, acknowledge their feelings, provide feedback if appropriate and encourage them to make their own decisions on how to solve problems. In contrast, highly controlling managers tend to give direct orders and prescribe solutions and they are not likely to not accept the input of their subordinates. Furthermore, they tend to use sanctions to ensure that the prescribed solution is used (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). An important issue in literature is the extent to which this conceptualization of leadership overlaps with *transformational leadership theory*. Indeed, as Bono and Judge (2003) indicate, also transformational leaders tend to listen to their subordinates and emphasize the search for meaning. However, it is also recognized that transformational leadership is not necessarily autonomy supportive (Bono & Judge, 2003). Given the fact that transformational leadership theory has been one of the most prevalent and most powerful leadership theories in the past two decades and bearing in mind the limited attention given to self-determination theory's conceptualization of leadership, Sheldon et al.

(2003) suggest that both theoretical frameworks could benefit from an integration. Indeed, on the one hand, in transformational leadership theory, little is known about the *processes* by which transformational leaders affect their subordinates' behaviors, while on the other hand, managers might affect their subordinates' motives in ways that are not yet documented in self-determination theory. Based upon research indicating that autonomy supportive management styles and transformational leadership are critical for promoting self-determination in the workplace (Deci et al., 1989; Sheldon et al., 2003; Ohly, Sonnentag & Pluntke, 2006) and bearing on research indicating that the feedback source's and supervisor's characteristics are important antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior (e.g. VandeWalle et al. 2000), we suggest that the supervisor's leadership style will affect the facets of feedback-seeking behavior. More specifically we argue that:

> ***Hypothesis 6a:*** *Transformational versus transactional leadership styles will be differentially associated with the various facets of feedback-seeking behavior*

Although feedback-seeking literature has not yet examined the contexts likely to influence the feedback-seeking motives, several scholars have stressed the need for further research in this area (e.g. Ashford et al., 2003; Tuckey et al., 2002). More specifically, the need to study the influence of these contextual antecedents without reliance on self-report data of the feedback seeker has been repeatedly stipulated (e.g. Tuckey et al., 2002). A whole body of research has evidenced that autonomous contexts and transformational leadership styles are associated with autonomous motives for various behaviors, whereas controlling contexts and transactional leadership styles result in controlled motives (Bono & Judge, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 1989; Judge, Bono, Erez & Locke, 2005). Based upon these insights we propose that:

> ***Hypothesis 6b:*** *The feedback seeking motives (i.e. autonomous versus controlled motives) will mediate the relationship between the manager's transformational versus transactional leadership style and subsequent feedback-seeking behavior of employees.*

Work climate perceptions

Not only the leadership style of the supervisor, but also the context as it is perceived by the subordinates, has been found to direct motivation and behavior (e.g. Dewettinck & Buyens, in press). In self-determination theory it is suggested that the degree to which individuals perceive their **work climate** as autonomy supportive versus controlling will affect their subsequent motivation and behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In this respect, three factors determine whether the work climate is perceived as autonomy-supportive: (1) elements that are inherent to the supervisor (quality of immediate supervision, supportive environment, quality of feedback from supervisor, opportunity to make inputs, and trust in supervisor); (2) elements that refer to the job design (personal autonomy, variety, potential for advancement); and (3) extrinsic elements (such as trust in the organization, security, satisfaction with pay and benefits) (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Thus, whereas the managers' leadership style focuses on the characteristics of the supervisor as contextual determinants of feedback-seeking behavior, the work climate refers to the interpretations that individuals attribute to their work environment (Deci et al., 1989). Also in feedback-seeking literature, the importance of studying the broader work climate, as perceived by the feedback seeker has been repeatedly stipulated. For example, in their theoretical paper, Ashford et al. (2003) suggested that perceptions about the impact of the broader work climate required further investigation. Based upon these observations, we argue that the work climate perceptions held by the employees will affect their feedback-seeking behavior.

> *Hypothesis 7a:* *The work climate perceptions of the feedback seeker will be differentially associated with the various facets of feedback-seeking behavior.*

Similar to the previously discussed antecedents, we can expect that the feedback-seeking motives will mediate the impact of the perceived climate on subsequent feedback-seeking behavior. For example, previous research conducted from a self-determination perspective revealed that work climate perceptions affect employee affects, behaviors and satisfactions (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989).

> *Hypothesis 7b:* *The feedback seeking motives (i.e. autonomous versus controlled motives) will mediate the relationship between work climate perceptions of the feedback seeker and subsequent feedback-seeking behavior.*

Goal framing patterns

Thirdly, according to self-determination theory, behavior is not only directed by the leadership style of the supervisor, but also by the type of goals that are emphasized within the social environment. While some contexts encourage the pursuit of intrinsic goals (e.g. self-development), others focus on the pursuit of extrinsic goals (e.g. financial success) (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens & Matos, 2005). These **goal framing** patterns have been found to affect numerous outcomes, such as learning activity and persistence (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). Also in feedback-seeking literature, scholars suggest that the goal framing patterns that prevail in the feedback context influence feedback-seeking behavior (e.g. Ashford & Cummings, 1983; VandeWalle et al., 2001). However, as to date, researchers have mainly included goals as one of the outcomes of feedback seeking or as a dispositional antecedent of feedback seeking (e.g. Renn & Fedor, 2001; VandeWalle et al., 2001), while theory suggests that the existing goal framing patterns in the feedback environment are also an antecedent of feedback-seeking behavior (Morrison & Weldon, 1990). Based on these insights, we argue that self-determination theory offers a relevant lens to study the goal context in which feedback-seeking behavior evolves. More specifically, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> ***Hypothesis 8a:*** *The goal framing patterns prevailing in the feedback-seeking context will be differentially associated with the various facets of feedback-seeking behavior.*

Analogous to the previously discussed relationships, we can also expect that the feedback-seeking motives will mediate the relationship between the goal framing patterns of the feedback-seeker's supervisor and subsequent feedback-seeking behavior. For example, previous research conducted from a self-determination perspective revealed that intrinsic goal framing patterns resulted in autonomous motives for learning behavior, whereas extrinsic goal framing lead to controlled motives for learning (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

> ***Hypothesis 8b:*** *The feedback seeking motives (i.e. autonomous versus controlled motives) will mediate the relationship between the goal framing patterns prevailing in the feedback-seeking context and subsequent feedback-seeking behavior.*

4.2.1.3 The role of need satisfaction at work

Bearing in mind the inconsistent research results found in previous feedback-seeking studies concerning the impact of numerous antecedents, we argue that the impact of the individual and contextual antecedents included in our model on subsequent feedback-seeking behavior is partially mediated by perceived "need satisfaction at work".

In fact, self-determination theory posits that contextual and interpersonal factors can either facilitate or impede motives to demonstrate behaviors through their contribution to the satisfaction of three universal psychological **needs**: (1) the need for competence, i.e. the need to succeed at optimally challenging tasks and to attain desired outcomes; (2) the need for autonomy, i.e. the need to experience choice and to be able to make decisions about one's own actions; and (3) the need for relatedness, i.e. the need for mutual respect, caring and reliance. In self-determination theory, these needs are conceived as innate psychological nutriments that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, the satisfaction of these three basic human needs serves as the engine for all human behavior and optimal human functioning, while individual characteristics and the context in which intentional behavior originates, can either promote or hinder the satisfaction of these needs. Based on research supporting the importance of need satisfaction in other research domains (Deci & Ryan, 2000) we include them as a partially mediating mechanism between the individual and contextual antecedents on the one hand and the feedback seeking motives on the other.

> *Hypothesis 9: Perceived need satisfaction at work will partially mediate the relationship between the individual and contextual antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior and the feedback-seeking motives.*

Important to note is that from a self-determination perspective, feedback-seeking behavior can be regarded as a self-regulating mechanism that is not only influenced by the level of need satisfaction, but that can also contribute to the satisfaction of these needs. Although we are aware of this self-regulation cycle, proposed by self-determination theory, we do not formulate specific hypotheses regarding the impact of feedback-seeking behavior on need satisfaction at work, as our cross-sectional research design (cf. paragraph 5) does not allow us to test this.

4.2.2 Outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior

The outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior in terms of employee performance have been studied quite extensively (e.g. Ang et al., 1993; Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Morrison & Weldon, 1990; VandeWalle et al., 2001), but this has lead to contradictory research results. However, in order to be a valuable complement for traditional feedback systems, which is one of the basic tenets of feedback-seeking theory, it is crucial to clarify the impact of feedback-seeking behavior on employee performance (Ashford et al., 2003). Therefore, employee performance is taken as the outcome variable in our conceptual model.

When studying the feedback seeking - performance relationship, it is important to bear in mind the inconsistent findings in prior research. Ashford et al. (2003) identified three important reasons for these inconsistencies: (1) the outcomes of feedback-seeking are difficult to assess because of the fact that the outcomes of feedback seeking will also affect subsequent feedback-seeking behavior; (2) existing studies often assess the outcomes of feedback-seeking in general, instead of examining the outcomes of particular facets of feedback-seeking; and (3) scholars neglect the possible presence of a number of mechanisms that affect the feedback seeking – employee performance relationship.

The first element is inherent to the nature of feedback seeking, but the other two arguments indicate that the relationship between feedback seeking and work related outcomes is less straightforward than generally assumed (Edwards, 1995). Following the suggestions of Ashford et al. (2003) and VandeWalle (2003), we therefore avoid adopting an oversimplified and one-dimensional perspective on feedback seeking. Instead, we expect a differential impact of the multiple facets of feedback-seeking behavior (frequency, strategy, source, timing & topic) on employee performance. As discussed, based upon the lack of empirical and theoretical work concerning the outcomes of specific facets of feedback-seeking behavior, we do not formulate hypotheses for the expected relationships between each facet of feedback seeking and employee performance separately. Instead, we already stated a general hypothesis (hypothesis 2).

Regarding the more specific relationships between facets of feedback seeking and performance, empirical studies have suggested that the several facets of feedback seeking will interact in their effect on performance. For example, inquiring (strategy) for negative feedback (topic) from the supervisor (source) has been found to be positively associated with performance evaluations, whereas seeking negative feedback is considered as a lack of self-confidence, which will in turn lead to less favorable performance evaluations (Ashford &

Tsui, 1991; Earley & Lituchi, 1990; Morrison & Bies, 1991; Trope & Neter; 1994). In addition, direct monitoring has been found to enhance performance, whereas indirect monitoring has a deteriorating impact on performance. Also other interactions between the facets of feedback seeking and performance can be expected. For example, it might be possible that those individuals who ask (strategy) negative feedback (topic) immediately after a given performance (timing), will be able to improve their performance. Within the scope of this research proposal, we will not formulate specific hypotheses concerning these interactions. Instead, we formulate the following general hypothesis:

> ***Hypothesis 10:*** *The five facets of feedback-seeking behavior will interact in their impact on employee performance.*

Furthermore, we agree with the emerging literature suggesting that additional research is needed to assess the mechanisms that influence the feedback seeking - performance relationship (Anseel & Lievens, 2002; Ashford et al., 2003). Bearing on insights derived from self-determination theory on the differential impact of autonomous versus controlled motives for enacting behaviors and on Ashford et al.'s (2003) suggestions that the feedback seeking-performance relationship is moderated by the seeker's characteristics, we argue that the feedback-seeking motives are not only important determinants of feedback-seeking behavior, but are also likely to influence the impact that feedback-seeking behavior has on employee performance. Treating the feedback-seeking motives as possible moderator will allow us to gain insight in the circumstances under which feedback-seeking lead to enhanced performance. More specifically, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> ***Hypothesis 11:*** *The feedback-seeking motives of the feedback seeker will moderate the impact of feedback-seeking behavior on employee performance as evaluated by the feedback source.*

5. RESEARCH METHOD

Regarding the **research design**, prior research has assessed feedback-seeking behavior in three ways: (1) experimental research setups to explore feedback-seeking under different conditions (e.g. Ang, Cummings, Straub & Early, 1993; Butler, 1993; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Williams et al., 1999) (2) cross-sectional research designs to explore feedback-seeking in organizational or other natural settings (e.g. Brown et al., 2001; Farr et al., 1999; Renn & Fedor, 2001; VandeWalle et al., 2000; Williams & Johnson, 2000); and (3) longitudinal studies, focusing on how feedback-seeking evolves over time (e.g. Ashford & Black, 1996; Fedor et al., 1992).

These studies mostly adopt a simplified operationalization of feedback-seeking behavior, focusing on only one facet of seeking, (e.g. the frequency) (Madzar, 1995). Our review of the literature indicated that in order to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior, it is important to assess feedback-seeking behavior as a multi-faceted construct (e.g. Ashford et al., 2003; VandeWalle, 2003). In order to grasp the antecedents and consequences of feedback-seeking behavior in a rigorous way, it is therefore important to assess the construct at the level of its five distinct facets.

As our conceptual model fits feedback-seeking behavior within a self-determination theoretical framework that includes both contextual and individual variables and as we are interested in performance outcomes, using a **multiple source design** seems most appropriate. First, prior research assessing the impact of contextual variables on feedback-seeking behaviors in organizational settings has mainly focused on the feedback seeker's *perceptions* of the feedback context (VandeWalle et al., 2000), which implies that most of the contextual variables that have been related to feedback-seeking behavior in work settings, have been obtained by self-reports. However, self-report procedures have the disadvantage that common method variance issues might be responsible for some of the results. Second, several authors have suggested that multiple source designs should be adopted when studying performance outcomes, as common method issues become particularly salient when performance is involved. Based on these two arguments, we consider applying a multiple source cross-sectional research design particularly appropriate. In order to grasp the different variables within the conceptual model as completely and objectively as possible, multiple sources will be involved and surveyed. Next to self-reporting data from the feedback-seeking agents, reporting data from superiors (middle managers) about the feedback-seeking behavior and

performance of the focal feedback seekers should be collected and analyzed to test the conceptual model.

We are aware of the fact that obtaining organizational consent and support for these secondary data might be difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, we consider the multiple-source character of this research as an important added value within the current state of the research on feedback-seeking behavior.

6. CONTRIBUTIONS

Obtaining insight in feedback-seeking behavior is a necessary step in understanding and managing ongoing feedback exchange in organizations. Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition that organizational success largely depends on the proactivity demonstrated by individual employees. Despite the emergence of feedback-seeking behavior in research and practice, a firm theoretical base to study the antecedents and consequences of feedback-seeking behavior has been lacking (Ashford et al., 2003). In line with the research objectives discussed in the introduction, our study contributes to theory development and to management practice in several ways.

A first **theoretical contribution** of this research can be found in its *conceptualization* of the construct of feedback-seeking behavior. By starting from a well-developed and theoretically founded conceptual model, this research will contribute to the theory development about feedback-seeking behavior. The construct is situated and explained in relationship with independent variables at the contextual and individual level on the one hand, and outcome variables on the other hand.

Second, in contrast with the majority of existing research, it is our objective to test deductively a number of specific hypotheses about the antecedents and consequences of feedback-seeking behavior, departing from a nomological network, based on a strong *theoretical and empirical rationale* (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). First, we respond to the need for theory building on the variables influencing feedback-seeking behavior (VandeWalle, 2003). The developed conceptual framework is unique since it includes contextual and individual antecedents simultaneously, as suggested by several authors (Tuckey et al., 2002). This makes it possible to assess the relative effects of both types of antecedents. Second, we add to theory building about feedback-seeking behavior, by treating feedback seeking as a multi-faceted construct, as suggested by Ashford et al. (2003). Third, our study represents the first to adopt a self-determination perspective in the domain of feedback-seeking behavior in

organizations. Furthermore, we will contribute to the understanding of the feedback seeking – employee performance relationship by considering the feedback-seeking motives as a potential moderator affecting this relationship. This way, we do not only contribute to the understanding of the factors that influence feedback seeking, but we also clarify how employees interpret and use the information they obtained by seeking feedback.

Third, the major ***methodological*** contribution of this paper can be found in the multiple-source cross sectional research design that we propose. Previous field studies investigating feedback seeking and employee performance have primarily departed from self-reported data. We argue that self-reports of the feedback seeker should be supplemented with reports from other sources in the organization, in order to reduce the potential problems of common method variance (Crampton & Wagner, 1994; Sidik & Jonkman, 2005). Although we are not the first to propose a multiple source research design in feedback-seeking literature, our model is unique as we suggest not only to collect multiple source data to measure the outcome variables (i.e. performance), but also on the level of the antecedent variables (i.e. goal framing and leadership style of the supervisor). This could contribute significantly to feedback-seeking literature, as the impact of the organizational context has mainly been studied through self-report questionnaires, measuring *feedback seekers' perceptions* of the context.

Studying feedback-seeking behavior from a self-determination perspective could also contribute to **management practice** in several ways. Obtaining an integrative insight in the individual and contextual antecedents of feedback-seeking behavior is a necessary step in understanding and managing the environment in which feedback-seeking takes place. Indeed, given the dramatic changes of the feedback context in organizations, human resources departments are challenged to implement systems that enhance individual development and organizational learning (De Vos, Buyens & De Stobbeleir, 2004). In this regard, stimulating constructive patterns of feedback seeking might be a valuable instrument to stimulate learning and development in the workplace and as a consequence, to improve employee performance.

For instance, our model provides insight in the ***contextual and individual dynamics*** that foster feedback seeking. These results can help organizations to optimize their performance appraisal systems by creating an environment in which feedback-seeking is stimulated.

Second, our model could increase our insights in the ***consequences*** of feedback-seeking in terms of employee performance and in the moderating role of feedback-seeking motives in the feedback-seeking - performance relationship. These results could help organizations to implement mechanisms that foster autonomous reasons for feedback-seeking behavior, such as individual coaching (Renn & Fedor, 2001).

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Figure 1: A self-determination model of feedback seeking behavior

Context

Manager's leadership style
(transformational versus transactional)

Work Climate Perceptions
(autonomous versus controlled)

Goal framing
(intrinsic, extrinsic or double)

Perceived need satisfaction at work:

Need for competence

Need for autonomy

Need for relatedness

Individual antecedents:

Causality orientation
(autonomous, controlled or impersonal)

Work value orientations
(intrinsic or extrinsic)

Feedback-seeking motives

Controlled regulation:
Impression management
Ego concern

Autonomous regulation:
Instrumental motive

Feedback-seeking behavior

Frequency
Strategy
Source
Timing
Topic

Employee performance

Technical-administrative performance

Leadership performance