Proactivity with image in mind: How employee and manager characteristics affect evaluations of proactive behaviours

Katleen E. M. De Stobbeleir[1]*, Susan J. Ashford[2] and Mary F. Sully de Luque[3]

[1]Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School, Ghent University, Gent, Belgium
[2]Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
[3]Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management, Glendale, Arizona, USA

This paper investigates image cost as a potential downside of proactivity. Drawing on attribution theory, we examine how people construct subjective evaluations of one manifestation of proactivity, feedback-seeking behaviour. Using a scenario methodology, we examined how employees' performance history, their manager's implicit person theory (IPT), and the frequency of their feedback-seeking affect how managers evaluate employees' feedback seeking. Results indicate that manager attribute average performers' feedback seeking significantly less to performance-enhancement motives than superior performers' seeking. Results further show that the frequency of feedback seeking and a manager's IPT interact in influencing managers' attributions for feedback seeking, with more entity oriented managers attributing frequent feedback seeking significantly more to impression-management motives than infrequent feedback requests. These results highlight the importance of not only the instrumental benefits of employee proactivity, but also its potential costs.

Given the increasing complexity, ambiguity, and dynamism of today's work world, employees are expected to become more self-directed and proactive (Campbell, 2000; Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008). In response, considerable research efforts have been invested in identifying the antecedents of various proactive behaviours including seeking feedback (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Ashford & Cummings, 1983), taking initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001; Roberson, 1990), expressing voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001), selling issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), revising tasks (Staw & Boettger, 1990), and building social networks (Morrison, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). The outcomes of proactive behaviours,

* Correspondence should be addressed to Dr Katleen E. M. De Stobbeleir, Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School, Ghent University, Reep 1, 9000 Gent, Belgium (e-mail: katleen.destobbeleir@vlerick.be).

however, have received far less attention. Further, while prior theorizing has tended to focus primarily on the benefits of proactive behaviours, scholars have recently suggested that these behaviours may have cost as well (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Given that the meaning of all behaviour is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), one key determinant of the costs or benefits associated with proactive behaviours is the interpersonal evaluations of proactive acts. Individuals observing proactivity may attribute desirable personal qualities to the proactive actor and see him or her as being more competent and more confident, and having more advancement potential. As discretionary behaviours that are not prescribed by role or context (Grant & Ashford, 2008) proactive behaviours are particularly susceptible to social-construction processes. Discretionary behaviours are likely to be seen as more reflective of the actor him or herself rather than as responsive to environmental pressures (Bem & Funder, 1978). As such, subjective evaluations of discretionary proactive behaviours may affect outcomes as important as reward decisions, performance evaluations, and opportunities for development and advancement (e.g., Bachrach, Powell, Bendoly, & Richey, 2006; Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002). In addition, individuals' anticipation of or concern over how proactive behaviours are evaluated can engender fear and anxiety, both of which have been shown to be primary deterrents to engaging in proactivity (Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Ashford *et al.*, 2003; Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Dutton & Ashford, 1993).

Building on attribution theory (e.g., Green & Mitchell, 1979; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Martinko, 1995; Weiner, 1974), we present a general, integrative framework (Figure 1) specifying how characteristics of the actor, the audience, and the frequency of proactivity affect targets' evaluations of proactive individuals and their proactivity. We test this model focusing on feedback-seeking behaviour (FSB) as the manifestation of proactivity, employees as the actors, and managers as the targets of seeking. FSB is generally considered desirable as it enables employees to adapt and respond to frequently changing goals and role expectations (Ashford *et al.*, 2003; Tsui & Ashford, 1994) and to improve their task performance (Chen, Lam, & Zhong, 2007). Despite its instrumental and informational value, feedback seeking may not always yield positive outcomes for individuals, in part because of how others evaluate it (Morrison & Bies, 1991). For example, Lam, Huang, and Snape (2007) recently showed that individuals who seek feedback are sometimes labelled as impression managers who are more interested in
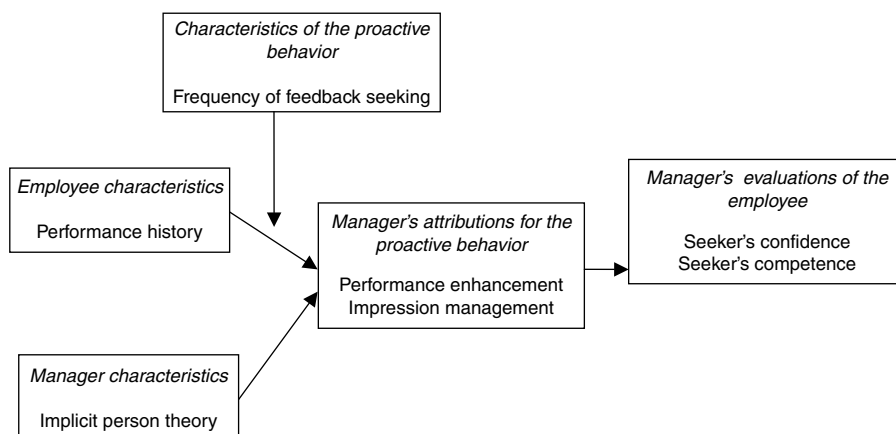

Figure 1. Conceptual model of others' evaluations of employee proactivity, applied to FSB.

impressing others than in obtaining diagnostic information about their performance. We also know that employees' concerns of how feedback seeking might look may deter them from seeking (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). To date, however, little is known about *why* managers sometimes interpret proactive feedback-seeking acts negatively, neither do we know under which conditions feedback seekers incur image costs (or benefits) when asking for feedback. Given recent theorizing suggesting that many proactive behaviours may share similar antecedents, processes, and consequences (Grant & Ashford, 2008), insight into how feedback-seeking acts are evaluated may provide a starting-point for a more general understanding of how potential negative evaluations (or what Ashford and Northcraft (1992) label, 'image costs') may be a barrier to employee proactivity.

Theory and hypotheses

Managers' attributions for proactivity

Social information-processing frameworks suggest that managers use attributional processes to interpret employees' behaviours. These attributions, in turn, affect how managers evaluate the individuals engaging in them (Allen & Rush, 1998; Feldman, 1981). Drawing on attribution theory (Green & Mitchell, 1979; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Martinko, 1995; Weiner, 1974), Lam *et al.* (2007) showed that supervisors' evaluations of the FSB of an employee are affected by two separate inferences about the cause of this behaviour: (1) attributions regarding the seeker's achievement focus and willingness to correct ineffective work behaviours (i.e., performance-enhancement attributions); and (2) attributions regarding the seeker's desire to manage the perceptions that others have of him or her (i.e., impression-management attributions). Their research showed that these attributions, in turn, affect important outcomes. The more managers attribute employees' FSB's to performance-enhancement motives, the better they tend to evaluate the seeker's work performance and the quality of their relationship with the seeker (Lam *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, managers' impression-management attributions are negatively related to the quality of their relationship with the seeker and the seeker's objective work performance (Lam *et al.*, 2007). Although these results highlight that managers' attributions affect their reactions to the feedback seeker, little is known about why managers make these attributions and the factors that shape their attributions.

Impact of employee characteristics

Information-processing theory suggests that managers' attributions for proactive acts such as feedback seeking are shaped by characteristics of the actor, characteristics of the target of those acts, characteristics of the behaviour and context factors (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). For example, regarding employee characteristics, Ashford and Northcraft (1992) found that feedback seekers with a history of average performance are perceived as less confident and less competent than seekers with a history of superior performance. Thus, the very performers who could benefit most from this proactive behaviour (those with an average performance history) may be the most reluctant to engage in it given how such seeking will be evaluated. These performers essentially pay twice: they often receive mixed or distorted feedback from others in organizations and they are negatively evaluated when they seek it.

Ashford and Northcraft (1992) did not examine *why* feedback seekers with a history of average performance were evaluated less favourably than were seekers with a history

of superior performance. DeNisi, Cafferty, and Meglino (1984) suggest that targets attend to salient information when evaluating people's behaviours. A salient cue such as a seeker's performance history might serve as a halo-effect (Asch, 1946; Thorndike, 1920) such that when targets are told how an individual has performed, they interpret that individual's specific behaviour (e.g., feedback seeking) in a way that corresponds to this general cue. Accordingly, consistent with Ashford and Northcraft (1992), we believe that managers use a seeker's past performance as a cue in evaluating and interpreting FSB. Generalizing from the cue of overall performance, managers are likely to interpret a superior performer's feedback seeking as a sign of the performer's achievement focus and concern for improvement (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Managers may be less likely to make such performance-enhancement attributions for an average performer's feedback seeking. Accordingly,

> **Hypothesis 1a:** Managers are more likely to make performance-enhancement attributions for feedback seeking by superior than average performing employees.

This logic suggests that managers view feedback seeking as being more consistent with superior than with average performance. According to Bargh and Chartrand (1999), schema-consistent information is processed easily and almost automatically. Thus, when a superior performer seeks feedback, managers will almost automatically attribute this seeking to performance-enhancement motives. However, when the seeking is inconsistent with the schema that the manager holds (e.g., when the individual is a poor or an average performer), additional processing occurs and alternative explanations are sought (Crant, 1996). The literature on feedback seeking has suggested an attribution to an impression-management motive as one such alternative explanation (Lam *et al.*, 2007). Because feedback seeking is more associated with superior performers (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992) and because lower-performing individuals frequently use impression management in attempts to influence others (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Pandey, 1981; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), we expect managers to be more likely to re-categorize an average performer's feedback seeking as an impression-management strategy (i.e., as an attempt by the seeker to convey the impression that he or she is a hard-working employee) than they would for a superior performer. Thus, when an average or poor performer asks for feedback, the inconsistency of this behaviour with the manager's view of the seeker (based on their overall performance) may lead managers to re-label this behaviour as an impression-management tactic (Crant, 1996). In contrast, managers who have categorized a feedback seeker as a superior performer will be less likely to attribute the seeker's behaviour to impression management, because this behaviour will almost automatically be interpreted in a manner consistent with the seeker's performance history. Accordingly,

> **Hypothesis 1b:** Managers are more likely to make impression-management attributions for feedback seeking by average than superior performing employees.

Moderating role of characteristics of the proactive behaviour
Information-processing theory further suggests that targets' evaluations of employees' behaviours depend on characteristics of the behaviour itself (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). One salient characteristic that targets consider when interpreting an employee's behaviour is the consistency of the behaviour (i.e., generality or frequency

of the behaviour over time; Kelley, 1967). Building on this logic, Crant (1996) states that behavioural consistency reinforces the attributions that targets make. Frequency is a variable of considerable interest in proactivity literature as well. To date, however, frequency has typically been studied in terms of whether or not the behaviour occurs, rather than in terms of how regularly it occurs (Grant & Ashford, 2008). As a result, we know little about whether some frequencies of proactive behaviour might be more or less costly (or beneficial) for individuals in terms of the types of attributions that targets make for them.

Feedback-seeking research has implicitly assumed that this proactive behaviour is monotonically beneficial: the more feedback people seek, the better. More frequent feedback seeking has been argued to lead to higher feelings of control (Ashford & Black, 1996) and to help employees to improve the quality of the relationship with their supervisor (Lam *et al.*, 2007). The question of whether more frequent feedback seeking can also have negative consequences or can be negatively evaluated remains unanswered. Research exploring the dynamics of help-seeking behaviour in organizations suggests that it can. For example, Nadler, Ellis, and Bar (2003) found that frequent help seeking was evaluated negatively. These authors concluded that targets interpret excessive help seeking as a dysfunctional behavioural pattern reflecting the seeker's overreliance on the help of others (Nadler *et al.*, 2003). Earlier, Ashford and Northcraft (1992) suggested, but did not test a similar mechanism in the feedback-seeking process, arguing that managers may interpret infrequent feedback seeking as a sign of the seeker's achievement focus, while frequent feedback requests may be interpreted negatively. Ashford and Northcraft (1992) suggested an inverted U-relationship between the frequency of seeking and targets' evaluations, with moderate levels of feedback seeking being interpreted positively, and no feedback seeking and excessive feedback seeking being interpreted negatively.

However, Crant's (1996) statement regarding the reinforcing impact of behavioural consistency on targets' attributions suggests that whether or not frequent feedback seeking will be interpreted negatively, depends on how the manager initially interpreted the behaviour. In Hypothesis 1, we stated that the performance history of the seeker serves as a primary cue for managers in making attributions. Linking this to Crant's (1996) statement, we propose that the attributions managers typically make for feedback seeking will be strengthened when that seeking is frequent. In essence, with frequent seeking, managers have a more consistent set of cues from which to make attributions than with infrequent feedback seeking, thereby increasing the likelihood of endorsing a particular attribution. As such, we propose that target's attributions are shaped by the seeker's performance history, and reinforced when the seeking is more frequent:

> *Hypothesis 2:*   A feedback seeker's performance history will interact with the frequency of seeking in determining the attributions managers make regarding FSB such that:

> *Hypothesis 2a:*   For seekers with a history of superior performance, managers will be more likely to make performance-enhancement attributions and less likely to make impression-management attributions for frequent feedback seeking compared to infrequent feedback seeking.

> *Hypothesis 2b:*   For seekers with a history of average performance, managers will be less likely to make performance-enhancement attributions and more likely to make impression-management attributions for frequent feedback seeking compared to infrequent feedback seeking.

Given that attribution theory makes no explicit statements about the impact of infrequently performed behaviours on targets' attributions, we did not formulate any

specific hypotheses regarding how infrequent feedback seeking would affect targets' initial attributions. Crant's (1996) logic implies that infrequently performed behaviours may either weaken managers' initial attributions, or may not affect them at all.

Characteristics of targets of proactivity

The manner in which employee proactivity is interpreted should depend not only on the seeker's characteristics, but also on attributes of the observers or *targets* of those behaviours (e.g., managers; Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). Eastman (1994), for example, proposed that depending on their personality, some managers may be biased towards viewing extra-role behaviours as impression management, while others may be biased towards viewing them as instrumental. One manager attribute particularly relevant to the interpretation of FSB is the manager's belief about the malleability of abilities and personality. As demonstrated by Dweck (1999) and Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995a,b), people tend to have implicit assumptions or what she labels implicit person theories (IPTs) about the 'changeability' of people. These assumptions fall on a continuum anchored by an entity theory (the belief that people's abilities are largely fixed) to an incremental theory (the belief that people can grow and develop their abilities). These IPTs have been found to affect both what people do (e.g., whether they will seek feedback; Heslin & VandeWalle, 2005), and how they judge others' behaviours (e.g., work behaviours; Heslin, Latham, & VandeWalle, 2005; Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008). We propose that IPT will affect how managers evaluate employees' FSB.

Specifically, according to Heslin and VandeWalle (2008), managers endorsing more of an entity theory should see little instrumental value in engaging in a behaviour aimed at developing capabilities that they believe are largely fixed to begin with. It is therefore unlikely that they would interpret feedback seeking as an achievement-oriented behaviour. Given this, they may resort to seeing it as a behaviour aimed at creating a particular impression in the eye of the manager.

Managers with beliefs more on the incremental end of the continuum are more likely to see the utility of diagnostic feedback and recognize the instrumental value of feedback seeking for enhancing performance (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008). Accordingly, these more incrementally oriented managers may interpret FSB as a tactic that people can use to obtain diagnostic feedback and thus as a behaviour that is achievement – rather than impression-management oriented.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Managers' implicit person theories will affect their attributions regarding feedback seeking such that:
>
> *Hypothesis 3a:* The more entity oriented a manager's IPT, the more likely the manager will make impression-management attributions for FSB.
>
> *Hypothesis 3b:* The more incrementally oriented a manager's IPT, the more likely the manager will make performance-enhancement attributions for FSB.

As stated, attribution theory suggests that managers consider the consistency or frequency of the behaviour when interpreting an employee's behaviour (Kelley, 1967). Thus, we expect that the attributions managers with different IPTs make for an individual seeking feedback will be reinforced and strengthened when that seeking is frequent because frequent seeking provides managers with a more consistent set of cues from which to make attributions. As such, more frequent feedback seeking should reinforce the manager's attributions. Linking this logic regarding the influence of

behavioural consistency on managers' attributions to our hypothesis regarding the influence of the manager's IPT, we propose the following:

> *Hypothesis 4:*   Feedback-seeking frequency will interact with managers' implicit person theories in impacting feedback-seeking attributions, such that:
>
> *Hypothesis 4a:*   The more entity oriented a manager's IPT, the more likely the manager will make impression-management attributions for frequent feedback seeking compared to infrequent seeking.
>
> *Hypothesis 4b:*   The more incrementally oriented a manager's IPT, the more likely the manager will make performance-enhancement attributions for frequent feedback seeking compared to infrequent seeking.

Again, we make no explicit statements about how infrequent feedback seeking will affect managers' initial attributions, and infrequent feedback seeking may either weaken managers' attributions or not affect them at all.

Attributions as a mediating mechanism between employee proactivity and outcomes

Hypothesis 1 suggested that the employee's performance history is likely to shape managers' attributions for feedback seeking. Attribution theory also suggests that targets' attributions for behaviours shape their overall attitudes to the performers of those behaviours, for example, how they evaluate the performance of the proactive actor (Green & Mitchell, 1979; Kelley, 1967; Martinko, 1995). Thus, not only should the seeker's performance history shape managers' attributions for feedback seeking, but managers' attributions should also shape what they think of the seeker. In support, Ashford and Tsui (1991) found that managers who sought negative feedback were evaluated more positively by their subordinates. While Ashford and Tsui's (1991) study highlights that feedback seeking may result in favourable evaluations, it was not clear from their data whether this occurred because employees actually improved their performance following feedback seeking or whether their seeking just created a positive impression with the manager.

Consistent with empirical work, we propose that when managers attribute feedback seeking to performance-enhancement motives, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards the seeker. For example, Chau, Dahling, Swee, and Levy (2008) showed in the laboratory that when supervisors made performance-enhancement attributions, they perceived the seeker as more motivated and committed than when they thought the feedback seeking was driven by impression-management motives. In the same vein, Lam *et al.* (2007) found that when supervisors made performance-enhancement attributions for subordinates' feedback seeking, their relationship with subordinates was of higher quality. The quality of the relationship was in turn related to the subordinate's objective performance (i.e., his/her productivity). Lam *et al.* (2007) suggested that this objective performance improvement occurred because employees who maintain higher-quality relationships with their supervisors are also evaluated more positively and can more easily acquire the support they need to improve their productivity.

Past research has not examined how feedback-seeking attributions affect general person and performance evaluations. Such evaluations are important as they form a personal reputation that is thought to affect subsequent outcomes such as influence levels in an organization (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003). Two such personal assessments have roots in past FSB research and are generally relevant for predicting important individual outcomes in organizations. These are a manager's

assessment of the employee's competence or potential for advancement within the organization and their appraisal of the personal qualities of the employee. Past research on feedback-seeking related feedback seeking to enhanced supervisor views of both the employee's confidence and competence (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Further, Roberts (2005, p. 687) comments that 'individuals invest a considerable amount of energy into constructing viable professional images by enacting personas that represent desirable qualities ... and that elicit approval and recognition from key constituents'. Such personal reputations serve as a cue for expected individual behaviours and characteristics such as competence and trustworthiness (Jones & Skarlicki, 2005). Roberts (2005) cites confidence as one of those desirable qualities. Fragale's (2006) recent theorizing suggests that individuals who are judged as confident and competent are more likely to garner support, raises, and promotions. Based on this theorizing and on Chau *et al.* (2008) and Lam *et al.*'s (2007) findings, it is likely that:

> *Hypothesis 5:*   Managers' attributions for feedback seeking will influence their perceptions of the seeker's confidence and competence.
>
> *Hypothesis 5a:*   Managers' impression-management attributions will relate negatively to their evaluation of the seeker's confidence and competence.
>
> *Hypothesis 5b:*   Managers' performance-enhancement attributions will relate positively to their evaluation of the seeker's confidence and competence.

Finally, we expect managers' attributions for proactive feedback seeking to mediate the relationship between feedback seeking and managers' appraisals of the seeker's confidence and competence. This logic is consistent with attribution theory which suggests that managers' attributions for behaviours mediate the relationship between those behaviours and managers' general evaluations of the performers of those behaviours (Green & Mitchell, 1979; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Martinko, 1995). This mediation hypothesis has not yet been tested in the feedback-seeking literature. However, related research in other areas suggests the mediating role of attributions between employee behaviours and subsequent performance evaluations. For example, empirical work rooted in the literature on organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) has shown that that the relationship between OCBs and performance judgments was mediated by managers' attributions for the behaviour (Allen & Rush, 1998). Extending these insights to the feedback-seeking literature, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 6:*   Managers' attributions for feedback seeking mediate the relationship between feedback seeking and manager's general appraisal of the seeker.

Method

Participants
Hypotheses were tested by having 319 current and former MBA students from an MBA programme located in the southwestern USA respond to an on-line survey. The mean age of the sample was 33 years; 69% were male; 78% Caucasian, 18% African-American, and 4% other; 89% had American nationality; the average work experience was 6.2 years. The subjects were recruited via a mass e-mailing to 1,781 individuals, for a response rate of 18%. With this low response rate, we needed to investigate the possibility of non-response rate bias (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Commonly occurring in survey research, non-response rate may limit the generalizability of research

results, especially when the non-response group differs in important ways from the respondent-group. Especially, passive non-response rate, i.e., unplanned non-response, should be considered given the mass-e-mailing technique we used for this study. Passive non-response includes surveys that were not received by respondents due to e-mail spam filters unknown to the researchers, or surveys that were forgotten by respondents (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Research suggests that people in this passive non-response group tend to be very similar to the respondents (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Accordingly, for most surveys, passive non-respondent bias is not problematic. To further follow-up on the low response, one of the researchers conducted interviews with the administrative personnel who typically sampled from this particular respondent pool. These individuals indicated that the response rate was both typical and expected from this pool of respondents. For these reasons, we were not overly concerned by the low response rate.

Procedure

The methodology replicated that of Ashford and Northcraft (1992). Respondents read a one-paragraph vignette that described a feedback-seeking act performed by an employee named Robert. In the vignette, adapted from Ashford and Northcraft (1992), respondents were asked to assume the role of Robert's manager and to imagine that the situation described, occurred in their own workplace. The vignettes provided the independent variables for the study by varying the feedback seekers' past performance (average vs. superior), and the frequency of seeking (frequently vs. infrequently). Following Chau *et al.* (2008), who found that the typical sign of the sought feedback is also an important determinant of managers' interpretations, we also varied the typical sign of the sought feedback (focused on strengths vs. weaknesses). This variable was included as one of the control variables in all subsequent analyses. Hence, the overall design was a fully crossed $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design. Respondents were randomly presented with one of the eight vignettes. (See Appendix A for a sample).

Given that our some of our manipulations had not been used before, the vignettes were pre-tested in a sample of 64 managers following an executive programme to ensure that our manipulations were effective. We included three questions to assess whether respondents' understanding of the situation described in the vignette matched our manipulations (e.g., 'What is Robert's performance history?'). Subsequent t tests showed significant differences in responses to the questions depending on the content of the scenario, highlighting that the responses corresponded to the manipulated content of the scenarios ($t(13) = 2.309, p < .05; t(12) = 2.32, p < .05; t(13) = 2.43, p < .05$). Further, to control for order effects, the three manipulations for each of the six possible sequences were counterbalanced in the pre-test, which generated 48 different sequences, representing the eight conditions. Given that no significant differences were found between these versions, we continued with the sequence provided in Appendix A. After having read the vignettes, respondents completed an anonymous questionnaire assessing their reactions to the feedback seeker.

Measures

Attributed motives

Managers' attributed motives for feedback seeking were measured with two Likert scales adapted from Lam *et al.* (2007). Respondents rated to what extent they

thought that Robert's feedback seeking was motivated by performance-enhancement motives and by impression-management motives. A sample item from the six-item performance-enhancement attribution scale is 'To what extent do you perceive Robert's FSB is motivated by a desire to perform better?' ($\alpha = .77$). A sample item from the eight-item impression-management attribution scale is 'To what extent do you perceive Robert's feedback-seeking behaviour is motivated by a desire to create a good impression?' ($\alpha = .91$). Subjects rated their impressions on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The full scales are included in Appendix B.

Implicit person theory

IPT was assessed with an eight-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) developed by Levy and Dweck (1997). Following Heslin *et al.* (2005), responses to the entity-worded items were reverse-coded and a mean IPT score for each subject was calculated ($\alpha = .91$), with high scores corresponding to an incremental IPT. Sample items included: 'The kind of person someone is, is something very basic about them and can't be changed very much' (entity-worded item) and 'People can change even their most basic qualities' (incrementally worded item).

Seeker's confidence

Impressions of the feedback seekers' confidence were measured using a four-item seven-point Likert scale developed by Ashford and Northcraft (1992) ($\alpha = .83$). Sample items include: 'I suspect that Robert is insecure' and 'I suspect that Robert is unconfident'. Items were coded so that high scores corresponded to positive ratings of Robert's confidence.

Seeker's competence

Impressions of the feedback seekers' competence were measured using assessments of their performance and advancement potential. We used Ashford and Northcraft's (1992) two-item scale: 'What is your impression of Robert's potential to advance' and 'What is your impression of Robert's performance potential'. The Spearman–Brown coefficient for this two-item scale's reliability was .89, indicating substantial internal consistency (Hulin & Cudeck, 2001).

Controls

Respondent age, gender, and sign of the feedback sought were included as control variables. Also, following Fedor, Eder, and Buckley (1989) we also assessed how easily respondents could imagine that the scenario described in the vignette had occurred in their own workplace and included it as a control variable.

Results

To test the hypotheses, we performed a series of regressions and general linear models (GLM). We utilized weighted effect coding to represent the three factors (performance history, frequency, and sign as a control variable) and to correct for unequal cell sample

sizes in the eight conditions (Aiken & West, 1991; Darlington, 1990). We centred the continuous variables by extracting the grand means of those variables from the subject's original score. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities of the variables of interest. Of note here is the mean-ease-of-imaging control variable, of 3.97 on a five-point scale, suggesting that subjects found the vignettes imaginable.

Seeker's performance history and manager's attributions

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that the seeker's performance history would independently and interactively (i.e., in interaction with the frequency of seeking) impact manager's attributions. As Table 2 shows, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported, while Hypothesis 2 was not.

We found support for Hypothesis 1a, stating that managers would attribute superior performers' feedback seeking significantly more to performance-enhancement motives than average performers' seeking ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$). Contrary to Hypothesis 1b, however, the seeker's performance history was unrelated to managers' impression-management attributions ($\beta = -0.04$, ns).

Hypothesis 2, predicting a two-way interaction between the seeker's performance history and the seeking frequency in impacting managers' attributions was not supported ($\beta = -0.04$, ns). Because the path coefficient for the interaction term only tells us whether or not there is an overall difference between the groups, we also performed a series of planned contrasts to test the specific subhypotheses. In contrast to what Hypothesis 2 predicted, these tests showed that average performers' frequent feedback seeking was not attributed more to impression-management motives than infrequent feedback seeking ($t(158) = 1.34$, ns), neither was superior performers' feedback seeking attributed more to performance enhancement than infrequent seeking ($t(158) = 1.21$, ns). Thus, managers' tendency to attribute seeking of superior performers to a desire to enhance performance and average performers' seeking to impression management was not enhanced when that seeking was frequent.

We found mixed support for the hypotheses predicting that the manager's IPT would independently and interactively (i.e., in interaction with the frequency of seeking) affect managers' attributions. In contrast to Hypothesis 3, the managers' IPT did not impact the attributions ($\beta = -0.05$, ns for performance-enhancement attributions and $\beta = -0.11$, ns for impression-management attributions). Hypothesis 4a, predicting that the more entity oriented the manager's IPT, the more likely the manager would make impression-management attributions for frequent seeking compared to infrequent seeking, was supported ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .05$). Figure 2 shows the predicted values for impression-management motives for frequent and infrequent seeking when IPT was high (following the advice of Fu *et al.*, 2007, we centred IPT at two standard deviation units above the mean, i.e., more incremental) and when IPT was low (centred at two standard deviation units below the mean, i.e., more entity theory). Further corroborating these findings, the simple slopes procedure (Aiken & West, 1991), showed that IPT had no association with impression-management attributions for infrequent feedback seeking (slope $= -.09$, ns), but had a negative and significant association for frequent feedback seeking (slope $= -.63$, $p < .01$). The IPT $\times$ frequency interaction was unrelated to performance-enhancement attributions ($\beta = -0.04$, ns), in contrast to Hypothesis 4b. More incrementally oriented managers did not attribute frequent feedback seeking significantly more to performance-enhancement attributions than infrequent feedback requests.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and reliabilities[a]

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Sign[b] (manipulated control variable)	0	—								
2. Frequency	0	—	.03							
3. Performance history	0	—	−.04	−.01						
4. Confidence	3.4	1.15	.09	.05	.45**	(.83)				
5. Competence	3.7	0.75	.03	.00	.62**	.18**	(.89)			
6. Performance-enhancement attributions	3.7	0.65	.04	−.06	.15*	.31**	.32**	(.77)		
7. Impression-management attributions	3.08	0.81	−.06	−.01	−.03	−.13*	−.14*	.10	(.91)	
8. IPT	3.62	0.90	−.04	−.04	−.02	−.02	−.06	−.05	−.08	(.91)
9. Ease-of-imagining	3.97	0.98	−.01	−.03	.09	.04	.09	.11	−.10	.01

Note. *Correlation is significant at the .05 level, two-tailed. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.
[a] Sign, typical sign of sought feedback (−1: weaknesses) (control variable); frequency, −1: frequent, 1: infrequent; performance history, −1: average, 1: superior; confidence, higher scores correspond to more positive evaluations; competence, higher scores correspond to more positive evaluations; IPT, higher scores correspond to incremental theory.
[b] Table 1 only reports the results for the manipulated control variable (sign). We also controlled for age, gender, and ease-of-imagining in all analyses.

Table 2. Coefficient estimates[a,b]

	Confidence		Competence		Performance-enhancement attributions		Impression-management attributions	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Step 1. Linking the independent variables to the dependent variables[a]								
Performance history	.46**	.06	.62**	.03				
Frequency	.06	.06	.00	.04				
IPT	.04	.07	−.02	.04				
Sign (manipulated control variable)	.00	.06	.04	.04				
Performance history × frequency	−.03	.06	−.91	.03				
IPT × frequency	−.12*	.07	−.09	.04				
Step 2. Linking the independent variables to the mediators								
Performance history					.14*	.04	−.04	.05
Frequency					−.06	.04	−.01	.05
IPT					−.05	.04	−.11	.05
Sign (manipulated control variable)					.04	.04	−.05	.05
Performance history × frequency					−.04	.04	.05	.05
IPT × frequency					−.04	.04	−.15*	.05
Step 3. Linking the independent variables and mediators to the dependent variables								
Performance history	.42**	.06	.58**	.03				
Frequency	.07	.06	.02	.03				
IPT	.04	.06	−.03	.04				
Sign (manipulated control variable)	.08	.06	.03	.03				
Performance history × frequency	.01	.06	.01	.04				
IPT × frequency	−.09	.06	−.06	.04				
Performance-enhancement attributions	.26**	.09	.26**	.05				
Impression-management attributions	−.11*	.07	−.15**	.04				

[a] All main terms and all first order, second order, and higher order interactions were entered in the regression equations. The table reports all main effects and the path coefficients for the hypothesized interactions. None of the other interactions were significant.

[b] Table 2 only reports the results for the manipulated control variable (sign). We also controlled for age, gender, and ease-of-imagining in all analyses.

*p < .05; **p < .01

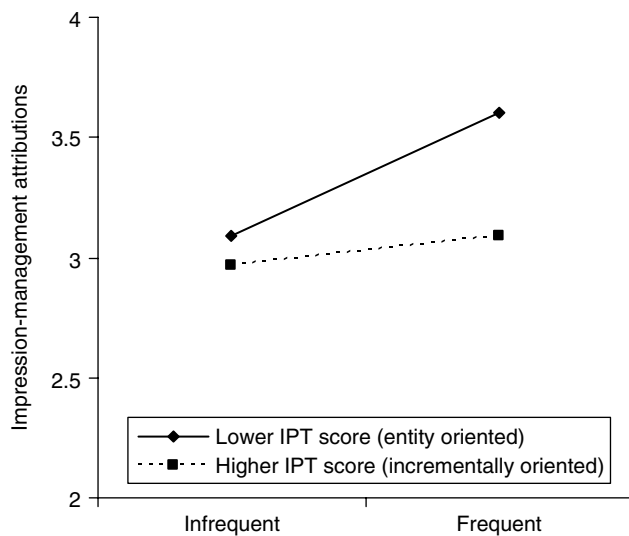**Figure 2.** Predicted values of impression-management attributions as a function of frequency of seeking and IPT. *Notes.* (a) Lower IPT score: estimated values when IPT was two standard deviations below the mean. (b) Higher IPT score: estimated values when IPT was two standard deviations above the mean.

Summarizing Hypotheses 1–4, we conclude that managers were more likely to make performance-enhancement attributions for a feedback seeker with a history of superior performance than for a seeker with a history of average performance. The formation of impression-management attributions is more complex. Rather than having main effects, the manager's IPT interacted with the frequency of seeking in impacting the manager's impression-management attributions. The more entity oriented the theory of the manager, the more likely the manager was to attribute frequent feedback seeking to impression-management motives.

Attributions for feedback seeking and outcomes

Hypothesis 5a predicted that managers' impression-management attributions would relate negatively to how they evaluated the seeker. In support of this hypothesis, we found that managers who tended to make performance-enhancement attributions evaluated the seeker more positively in terms of their confidence ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$) and their competence ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$). Attributed impression-management motives related negatively to manager's evaluations of the seeker's confidence ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < .05$) and to evaluations of the seeker's competence ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 5b.

Mediation analyses

To test whether managers' attributions mediated the effects of the independent variables on managers' evaluations of the seeker's confidence and competence (Hypothesis 6), we followed the three-step approach recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), and performed a performance × frequency × IPT GLM on evaluations of seekers' confidence and competence. We found a performance main effect ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < .01$), and a frequency × IPT interaction effect ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$) on seekers'

confidence. For seekers' competence, we only found a significant main effect of the seeker's performance history ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < .01$).

We then entered the full factor model and the attributions simultaneously into the regression. Following Edwards and Lambert (2007), these regression equations also included the interaction terms of the mediator with the independent variables. Performance history remained a significant predictor of seekers' confidence ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .01$) and competence ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .01$), thereby excluding full mediation. As the Baron and Kenny (1986) method provides a conservative test of mediation effects, we also tested whether the indirect paths were significant (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). This test showed that the indirect effect of performance history on seekers' confidence and competence via performance-enhancement attributions was significant ($z = 2.04$, $p < .05$ and $z = 4.71$, $p < .01$, respectively), supporting partial mediation.

We then tested whether impression-management attributions mediated the interaction effects of frequency $\times$ IPT on seekers' confidence (note that these interactions did not affect performance potential evaluations). When we entered the full factor model and impression-management attributions simultaneously into the regression, the interaction effect was reduced to insignificance ($\beta = -0.09$), thereby providing support for full mediation.

In sum, our results indicate that managers' impressions of feedback seekers are influenced by the seeker's performance history and the manager's IPT and that the frequency of feedback seeking is a relevant moderator of IPT's effects. Results further show that managers' attributions for feedback seeking are one underlying mechanism explaining why FSB affects how any individual is seen in the organization along important dimensions of confidence and competence (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Fragale, 2006; Roberts, 2005).

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

Proactivity has many well-documented upsides (e.g., Chan, 2006; see also Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Our research explores some of the risks and potential downsides of engaging in proactive behaviour. Our results are suggestive of the types of variables and processes that affect how managers evaluate employee proactivity, and to the extent that employees understand these variables and processes, of the factors that may influence employees' decisions to engage in these proactive behaviours. While our results may not generalize to all proactive behaviours, Grant and Ashford (2008) argued that learning about one proactive behaviour may be suggestive of the general categories of variables that influence all proactive behaviours.

Our results suggest that general attributes of a person (in this case, their performance history) serve as a cue that shapes managers' evaluations of the person's proactivity (in this case, feedback seeking). Specifically, our results confirm those found in previous research (e.g., Ashford and Northcraft, 1992) that the seeker's performance history shapes how feedback seekers are evaluated. We add to the research by showing that the seeker's performance history influences manager's attributions for feedback seeking (Hypothesis 1a). For superior performers, all forms of feedback seeking seem to be viewed as a tactic used to enhance performance. For average performers, all forms of feedback seeking seem to be viewed less positively in terms of the performance-enhancement attributions that managers make. These results add to those reported in

prior work (e.g., Chau *et al.*, 2008; Lam *et al.*, 2007) by providing an initial test of *why* managers make performance-enhancement attributions for FSB. We did not find the suggested effect of performance history on impression-management attributions. Managers did not attribute average performers' feedback seeking significantly more to impression-management motives than superior performers' seeking (i.e., Hypothesis 1b was not supported). One possible reason may be that we did not consider managers' perceptions regarding the value of seeking feedback. Feedback requests in the face of a history of weak performance may lead manager to question the value of asking for feedback, because the behaviour does not improve performance. This may lead the manager to question the sincerity of the seeker's desire to improve (and result in an impression-management attribution). Future research should examine how managers' perceptions regarding the value of FSB affects the attributions made for this seeking.

We also did not find the suggested interaction effect between the frequency of seeking and the seeker's performance history. One possible reason may be our operationalization of feedback-seeking frequency as a categorical variable. It may be that when taking the frequency of seeking into account in their evaluations of feedback seekers, managers adopt different tipping points for superior performers than for average performers. For those with a history of superior performance, feedback seeking may convey as positive an impression when it occurs either frequently or infrequently. However, for average performers, the benefits of feedback seeking may become costs the more often it occurs. Another reason for our lack of findings may be that rather than the association suggested by attribution theory, there may be an inverted U-shape association between frequency and targets' attributions, regardless of the performance history of the seeker. Ashford and Northcraft (1992) suggested that supervisors may prefer moderate levels of feedback seeking, rather than infrequent or excessive feedback seeking. Our operationalization of feedback-seeking frequency as a categorical variable (feedback was either sought frequently or infrequently) precludes us from testing these hypotheses, and they are therefore an attractive avenue for future research.

This study is also the first to examine how manager characteristics affect how managers interpret individuals' proactivity. A key finding of this study is that managers with an entity IPT attribute frequent feedback seeking significantly more to impression-management motives infrequent seeking (Hypotheses 4). Thus, the optimal frequency of feedback seeking – at least in terms of impression management – may depend on characteristics of the manager who is the target of that seeking. While IPT is a variable specifically associated with feedback seeking as a particular form of proactivity, other manager characteristics such as managers' attributional complexity (e.g., Fletcher, Danilovacs, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder, 1986), and relational characteristics such as the quality of the relationship between the employee and the manager may be worthy of future investigation. Similarly, future research should examine the impact of other patterns of FSB on managers' attributions. We examined behavioural consistency (operationalized as the frequency of seeking), but other patterns, such as timing may shape targets' attributions. The general point exemplified by our results is that to understand the outcomes of proactivity, we need to understand how it is evaluated and to understand that, we need to know something about the observer of the proactive act and about the pattern of the act.

We proposed that managers make two separate attributions for any proactive behaviour: performance-enhancement attributions and impression-management attributions. This distinction, assessed here regarding feedback seeking, was also made by Bolino (1999) in the OCB literature, and is worthy of follow-up for any of a larger class of

proactive behaviours. Our results showed that the formation of a *performance-enhancement attribution* regarding feedback seeking happens in a relatively straightforward manner. Managers' performance-enhancement attributions were only influenced by the feedback seeker's performance history. Though we did not find the predicted interaction with the feedback-seeking frequency, our main effect finding parallels Ashford and Northcraft's (1992) pattern of results in which for three suggested determinants of manager impressions, only performance history mattered. These results are also consistent with those reported by Chau *et al.* (2008) who found no relationship between the sign of the sought feedback and attributed performance-enhancement motives. This pattern across studies suggests either that performance history swamps all other effects or that other explanations need to be explored. However, the cumulative evidence showing a lack of main and interaction effects for the previously hypothesized influence of role (supervisors vs. subordinates), tenure (new vs. old; Ashford & Northcraft, 1992), and now for frequency and our control variable feedback sign, suggests that the performance-cue effect is quite robust.

Finally, our results highlight that proactivity researchers should focus on both the benefits and costs of the proactive behaviours that they study. Although Grant and Ashford (2008) strongly argued that not all proactive behaviours may be beneficial, researchers tend to focus on how proactivity helps individuals, work-groups, and organizations. The present study provides a stimulus for greater investigation into the potential downsides of proactivity by showing that others' interpretations (i.e., attributions) of proactive acts are important mediating mechanisms, predictive of whether good or bad outcomes might flow from that proactivity.

Practical implications

Our results suggest that organizations interested in enhancing the frequency of proactivity would do well to focus on reducing the perceived impression-management costs of it. For example, in the feedback area, organizations might implement training interventions on the importance of feedback in organizations. These training interventions may be particularly relevant for entity theorists who do not fully appreciate the diagnostic value of feedback and FSB. As shown in previous research, training entity theorist managers to become more incremental has important positive consequences for their willingness to coach their subordinates (Heslin, VandeWalle, & Latham, 2006) and helps them to better recognize both good and poor performance (Heslin *et al.*, 2005). Such training may also help entity theory leaders to see the benefits of feedback and feedback seeking, especially for average performers who need it the most.

Our results also provide a caution for proactive feedback seekers. These findings suggest that it might be wise to gain some insight into their own performance history as this determines whether or not feedback seeking creates positive attributions and therefore outcomes. For superior performers, all forms of feedback seeking seem to yield benefits, as their seeking is interpreted as an effort to improve their performance. For average performers though, all forms of feedback seeking seem to yield attributional costs. These costs need to be recognized and managed (e.g., by allocating seeking across many managers so that any manager only experiences infrequent seeking). Also, before initiating feedback seeking, it is, paradoxically, important for feedback seekers to have a sense of how they are perceived to be performing; paradoxical because the act of feedback seeking may be what is needed for individuals to gain this insight. We are not suggesting that average performers should generally avoid feedback inquiry.

However, instead of seeking feedback through direct inquiry, employees with a reputation for average performance may better develop a broader repertoire of seeking strategies such as monitoring (Ashford & Cummings, 1983) and indirect inquiry (Sully de Luque & Sommer, 2000), which are less public.

Finally, our results indicate that it is important for seekers to understand their manager's IPT, their beliefs regarding ability. If managers do not believe that ability can change (i.e., when they endorse an entity theory), they will not see feedback as helping the individual to grow. In such cases, frequently seeking feedback may be very costly. However, an implication of our research is that employees might be wise to direct their intense feedback seeking initiatives towards managers they perceive as being more incrementally inclined. Then frequently asking for feedback may yield impression-management benefits. Again, we are not suggesting that employees should avoid asking for feedback if their supervisor has an entity IPT. However, instead of directly asking for feedback, individuals may choose other tactics, or highlight the instrumental value of feedback to their supervisors.

Limitations

In considering our results and their practical implications, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, our use of a scenario research design limits the generalizability of our results. To partially assess this, we asked respondents how easy it was to imagine the scenario happening in their organization. The 3.97 mean of this variable is consistent with the means found in prior scenario research (e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Fedor *et al.*, 1989) and suggests that respondents found the scenarios easy to imagine. Moreover, research has shown that paper person manipulations do hold value in the study of organizational behaviour in that the results yielded by such methods largely correspond to those obtained in the field (Woehr & Lance, 1991). Nevertheless, future research should test the generalizability of the findings of our research in real-life settings.

Another limitation of this study is that we only found support for some of our hypotheses but not others and that the effect sizes of our supported hypotheses tended to be rather modest. We note, however, that both statistically significant findings and non-findings have important implications for examining theoretically derived hypotheses. For example, the fact that managers only used the seeker's performance history as a cue when attributing FSB to performance-enhancement motives, while attributions to impression-management motives were shaped by the manager's IPT and the frequency of seeking shows that impressions of feedback seeking are formed in more complex ways than previously assumed. So far, the literature has implied that similar mechanisms underlie both types of attributions (e.g., Lam *et al.*, 2007). Our research shows that more theoretical guidance is needed to explore the potentially different underlying processes that explain different attributions. One additional reason for the non-significant path coefficients may have been our manipulations. For example, by focusing on superior and average performers, we did not consider the full range of possible performance histories of employees (i.e., poor performance, average performance, good performance, and superior performance). Future research without this range restriction may provide more insight in the specific ways that different levels of performance are being interpreted.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study advance our understanding of how managers' impressions of proactivity (in this case feedback seeking) are influenced

by characteristics of the actor (in this case the performance history of the seeker), characteristics of the target or observer (in this case the manager's IPT), and characteristics of the proactive behaviour itself (in this case the frequency of seeking). Our two key findings, namely (1) that average performers' feedback seeking is viewed less positively in terms of the performance-enhancement attributions and (2) that more entity-oriented managers view frequent feedback seekers more as impression managers than infrequent seekers, not only have important theoretical implications, but also delineate the boundary conditions that shape the 'effective' inquiry for feedback. Finally, by showing that managers' attributions for feedback seeking are one underlying mechanism explaining why FSB affects important individual outcomes such as how a person is viewed and how their performance potential is assessed, this study also emphasizes the socially constructed nature of proactivity and highlights the importance of evaluations of employee proactivity in predicting outcomes.

Acknowledgements

References

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Allen, T. D., & Rush, M. C. (1998). The effects of organizational citizenship behavior on performance judgments: A field study and a laboratory experiment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*(2), 247–260.

Anseel, F., & Lievens, F. (2007). The relationship between uncertainty and desire for feedback: A test of competing hypotheses. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37*, 1007–1040.

Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41*, 258–290.

Ashford, S. J., & Black, S. J. (1996). Feedback seeking during organizational entry: The role of desire for control. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*, 199–214.

Ashford, S. J., Blatt, R., & VandeWalle, D. (2003). Reflections on the looking glass: A review of research on feedback-seeking behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management, 29*, 773–799.

Ashford, S. J., & Cummings, L. L. (1983). Feedback as an individual resource: Personal strategies of creating information. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 32*, 370–398.

Ashford, S. J., & Northcraft, G. B. (1992). Conveying more (or less) than we realize: The role of impression-management in feedback seeking. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 53*, 310–334.

Ashford, S. J., & Tsui, A. S. (1991). Self-regulation for managerial effectiveness: The role of active feedback seeking. *Academy of Management Journal, 34*, 251–280.

Bachrach, D. G., Powell, B. C., Bendoly, E., & Richey, R. G. (2006). Organizational citizenship behavior and performance evaluations: Exploring the impact of task interdependence. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 193–201.

Bargh, J. A., & Chartrand, T. L. (1999). The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist*, *54*(7), 462–479.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*, 1173–1182.

Bem, D. J., & Funder, D. C. (1978). Predicting more of the people more of the time: Assessing the personality of situations. *Psychological Review*, *85*, 485–501.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Bolino, M. C. (1999). Citizenship and impression management: Good soldiers or good actors? *Academy of Management Review*, *24*(1), 82–98.

Bolino, M. C., Kacmar, K. M., Turnley, W. H., & Gilstrap, J. B. (2008). A multi-level review of impression management motives and behaviors. *Journal of Management*, *34*(6), 1080–1109.

Bolino, M. C., Turnley, W. H., & Niehoff, B. P. (2004). The other side of the story: Reexamining prevailing assumptions about organizational citizenship behavior. *Human Resource Management Review*, *14*, 229–246.

Campbell, D. J. (2000). The proactive employee: Managing workplace initiative. *Academy of Management Executive*, *14*, 52–66.

Chan, D. (2006). Interactive effects of situational judgment effectiveness and proactive personality on work perceptions and work outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *91*, 475–481.

Chau, S. L., Dahling, J. J., Swee, H.-Y., & Levy, P. E. (2008). *Antecedents and consequences of supervisor-attributed motives for feedback-seeking behavior*. Working paper.

Chen, Z., Lam, W., & Zhong, J. A. (2007). Leader–member exchange and member performance: A new look at individual-level negative feedback-seeking behavior and team-level empowerment climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*, 202–212.

Crant, J. M. (1996). Doing more harm than good: When is impression management likely to evoke a negative response? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *26*(16), 1454–1471.

Crant, J. M. (2000). Proactive behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management*, *26*, 435–462.

Darlington, R. B. (1990). *Regression and linear models*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

DeNisi, A. S., Cafferty, T. P., & Meglino, B. M. (1984). A cognitive view of the performance appraisal process: A model and research propositions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, *33*, 360–396.

Dutton, J. E., & Ashford, S. J. (1993). Selling issues to top management. *Academy of Management Review*, *18*, 397–428.

Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Dweck, C. S., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (1995a). Implicit theories and their role in judgments and reactions: A world from two perspectives. *Psychological Inquiry*, *6*, 267–285.

Dweck, C. S., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (1995b). Implicit theories: Elaboration and extension of the model. *Psychological Inquiry*, *6*, 322–333.

Eastman, K. K. (1994). In the eyes of the beholder: An attributional approach to ingratiation and organizational citizenship behavior. *Academy of Management Journal*, *37*, 1379–1391.

Edwards, J. R., & Lambert, S. L. (2007). Methods for integrating moderation and mediation: A general analytical framework using moderated path analysis. *Psychological Methods*, *12*, 1–22.

Fedor, D. B., Eder, R. W., & Buckley, M. R. (1989). The contributory effects of supervisor intentions on subordinate feedback responses. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *44*, 396–414.

Feldman, J. M. (1981). Beyond attribution theory: Cognitive processes in performance appraisal. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *66*(2), 127–148.

Ferris, G. R., Blass, F. R., Douglas, C., Kolodinsky, R. W., & Treadway, D. C. (2003). Personal reputations in organizations. In J. Greenberg (Ed.), *Organizational behavior: The state of the science* (pp. 211–246). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaurm.

Fletcher, G. J. O., Danilovacs, P., Fernandez, Q., Peterson, D., & Reeder, G. D. (1986). Attributional complexity: An individual differences measure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*, 875–884.

Fragale, A. R. (2006). The power of powerless speech: The effects of speech style and task interdependence on status conferral. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *101*, 243–261.

Frese, M., & Fay, D. (2001). Personal initiative: An active performance concept for work in the 21st century. In B. M. Staw & R. I. Sutton (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 23, pp. 133–187). London: JAI Press.

Fu, J. H., Morris, M. W., Lee, S., Chao, M., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (2007). Epistemic motives and cultural conformity: Need for closure, culture and context as determinants of conflict judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*(2), 191–207.

Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1988). Impression management in organizations. *Journal of Management*, *14*(2), 321–338.

Giacalone, R. A., & Rosenfeld, P. (1989). *Impression management in the organization*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Grant, A., & Ashford, S. J. (2008). The dynamics of proactivity at work. In B. M. Staw & R. I. Sutton (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 28, pp. 3–34). London: Jai Press.

Green, S., & Mitchell, T. (1979). Attributional processes of leaders in leader–member interactions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, *23*, 429–459.

Heslin, P. A., Latham, G. P., & VandeWalle, D. (2005). The effect of implicit person theory on performance appraisals. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90*, 842–856.

Heslin, P. A., & VandeWalle, D. (2005). *Self-regulation derailed: Implicit person theories and feedback seeking*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Los Angeles, CA.

Heslin, P. A., & VandeWalle, D. (2008). Managers' implicit assumptions about personnel. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *17*, 219–223.

Heslin, P. A., VandeWalle, D., & Latham, G. P. (2006). Keen to help? Managers' implicit person theories and their subsequent employee coaching. *Personnel Psychology*, *59*, 871–902.

Hulin, C. L., & Cudeck, R. (2001). Cronbach's alpha on two-item scales. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *10*, 55–67.

Johnson, D. E., Erez, A., Kiker, D. S., & Motowidlo, S. J. (2002). Liking and attributions of motives as mediators of the relationships between individuals' reputations, helpful behaviors, and raters' reward decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*, 808–815.

Jones, D. A., & Skarlicki, D. P. (2005). The effects of overhearing peers discuss an authority's fairness reputation on reactions to subsequent treatment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90*, 363–372.

Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *31*, 457–501.

Kelly, G. A. (1967). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.

Lam, W., Huang, X., & Snape, E. (2007). Feedback-seeking behavior and leader–member exchange: Do supervisor attributions matter? *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*, 348–363.

Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, *107*(1), 34–47.

LePine, J. A., & Van Dyne, L. (1998). Predicting voice behavior in work groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *83*, 853–868.

LePine, J. A., & Van Dyne, L. (2001). Voice and cooperative behavior as contrasting forms of contextual performance: Evidence of differential relationships with big five personality characteristics and cognitive ability. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *86*, 325–336.

Levy, S. R., & Dweck, C. S. (1997). *Implicit theory measures: Reliability and validity data for adults and children*. Unpublished manuscript.

Martinko, M. J. (1995). *Attribution theory: An organizational perspective*. Delray Beach, CA: St Lucie Press.

Morrison, E. W. (2002). Newcomers' relationships: The role of social network ties during socialization. *Academy of Management Journal, 45*, 1149–1160.

Morrison, E. W., & Bies, R. J. (1991). Impression management in the feedback-seeking process: A literature review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review, 16*, 522–544.

Morrison, E. W., & Phelps, C. (1999). Taking charge: Extra-role efforts to initiate workplace change. *Academy of Management Journal, 42*, 403–419.

Nadler, A., Ellis, S., & Bar, I. (2003). To seek or not to seek: The relationship between help seeking and job performance evaluations as moderated by task-relevant expertise. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 33*, 91–109.

Ostroff, C., & Kozlowski, S. W. J. (1992). Organizational socialization as a learning process: The role of information acquisition. *Personnel Psychology, 45*, 849–874.

Pandey, J. (1981). A note on social power through ingratiation among workers. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 54*, 65–67.

Roberson, L. (1990). Prediction of job satisfaction from characteristics of personal work goals. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 11*, 29–41.

Roberts, L. M. (2005). Changing faces: Professional image construction in diverse organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review, 30*, 685–711.

Rogelberg, S. G., & Stanton, J. M. (2007). Understanding and dealing with organizational survey nonresponse. *Organizational Research Methods, 10*, 195–209.

Staw, B. M., & Boettger, R. D. (1990). Task revision: A neglected form of work performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*, 534–559.

Sully de Luque, M. F., & Sommer, S. M. (2000). The impact of culture on feedback-seeking behavior: An integrated model and propositions. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 829–849.

Thorndike, E. L. (1920). A constant error on psychological rating. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 4*, 25–29.

Tsui, A. S., & Ashford, S. J. (1994). Adaptive self-regulation: A process view of managerial effectiveness. *Journal of Management, 20*(1), 93–121.

VandeWalle, D. (2003). A goal orientation model of feedback-seeking behavior. *Human Resource Management Review, 13*, 581–604.

Weiner, B. (1974). *Achievement motivation and attribution theory.* Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

Woehr, D. J., & Lance, C. E. (1991). Paper people versus direct observation: An empirical examination of laboratory methodologies. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 12*, 387–397.

Yukl, G. A., & Tracey, J. B. (1992). Consequences of influence tactics used with subordinates, peers, and the boss. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 77*, 525–535.

Appendix A

Today is a day like any other. You work for a large Southwestern organization. You have several immediate co-workers, you report to a single superior, and you have a small staff reporting to you. You are sitting comfortably at your desk working on final preparations for your year-end area review when you hear a knock on your office door. You look up to find Robert, one of your subordinates, standing in the doorway. Robert has a history of *superior performance*. You and Robert were involved in an important staff meeting yesterday. The meeting was long and covered a variety of topics. One of the topics of the meeting was a project that Robert is working on. Robert gave a prepared presentation that lasted about 15 min, and then he spent about 5 min answering questions about the project. Robert asks if you are free for a few minutes. After the two of you exchange greetings, Robert asks you, as he has done *only a few times before*, to comment on the *weaknesses* of his presentation.

Appendix B

To what extent do you perceive Robert's FSB is motivated by the following:

Performance-enhancement items:
  (1) A desire to discover what his responsibilities are.
  (2) A desire to discover exactly what is expected of him.
  (3) A desire to perform better.
  (4) A desire to learn.
  (5) A desire to understand better what you want from him.
  (6) A desire to strengthen your working relationship.

Impression-management items:
  (1) A desire to enhance his him image (i.e., to make you believe that he is a helpful employee).
  (2) A desire to build-up for a later exchange.
  (3) A desire to show-off his expertise.
  (4) A desire to look good.
  (5) A desire to influence how you see him.
  (6) A desire to capture your attention on him.
  (7) A desire to obtain recognition or other organizational rewards.
  (8) A desire to create an impression.