

Why do you ask? The effects of perceived motives on the effort that managers allocate toward  
delivering feedback

Manuscript published in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*

October 30, 2021

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## Abstract

Although people are generally motivated to perform well at work, there is often ambiguity regarding whether they are meeting their organization's standards. As such, people often seek feedback from others. To date, feedback-seeking research has emphasized the feedback *seeker*, identifying traits and circumstances associated with feedback-seeking, whereas far less is known about this process from the feedback *source*'s point of view. However, we expect that feedback sources will vary in their willingness to allocate effort toward delivering feedback. Specifically, integrating the cost-value framework of feedback with self-regulatory theories of goal prioritization, we predict that effort allocated toward a feedback episode is determined by the feedback *source*'s perceptions of the feedback *seeker*'s motives for seeking feedback. Across two complementary studies we found perceived instrumental motives (i.e., a desire to improve one's performance) to be positively related to the amount of effort put toward delivering feedback, and perceived image enhancement motives (i.e., a desire to impress the feedback source) to be negatively related to effort allocation. Importantly, Study 1 was a field study in which managers were asked to report on a recent episode in which a subordinate had sought their feedback, and Study 2 used an experimental design in which feedback-seeking motives were manipulated. Thus, the current research makes an important contribution to the literature by considering the often overlooked role that the feedback source plays in the feedback process. Moreover, triangulation of both field and experimental data enhances both the external and internal validity of our conclusions.

*Keywords:* feedback-seeking behavior, feedback-sources, feedback-seeking motives, effort

It can often be difficult for employees to know whether their performance conforms to organizational standards. Many work tasks offer employees little information by which to judge their own performance (e.g., problem solving, customer service, proposal writing), and formal performance evaluations typically occur only annually or bi-annually (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Kromrei, 2015; Murphy, 2020). Therefore, employees are often personally responsible for estimating and regulating their own day-to-day performance. As a result, employees often seek feedback about their performance from managers, coworkers, and the environment (i.e., feedback *sources*). Although feedback can be an important developmental tool, a meta-analysis of the feedback-seeking literature found the relationship between feedback-seeking and job performance to be weak and variable (Anseel et al., 2015). Therefore, simply seeking feedback may not always or consistently lead to improved performance.

One reason feedback-seeking behavior may not uniformly lead to favorable outcomes is because feedback sources may not always allocate high levels of effort when responding to feedback requests. Providing high quality feedback requires sources to recall the feedback seeker's task-relevant behaviors, integrate recollections, compare them against organizational standards, and clearly (and often sensitively) convey that information (Landy & Farr, 1980). In other words, providing high-quality feedback requires effort. However, feedback sources may not always have ample time or energy to allocate to providing feedback, meaning the feedback that seekers receive may not be as useful as it could be. Nevertheless, very little research has considered the feedback process from the source's perspective (cf., Lam et al., 2007). The purpose of the current research is to address this critical gap in the literature.

We address this issue by integrating the cost-value framework of feedback-seeking (e.g., Ashford, 1986) with self-regulatory theories of goal-prioritization (e.g., Neal et al., 2017). We

argue that feedback sources are sensitive to the costs and benefits of providing feedback and thereby make *strategic* decisions about the level of effort they devote to this process. Namely, we predict that feedback sources form perceptions of seekers' motives for seeking feedback, and subsequently allocate effort to providing feedback according to these perceived motives. In particular, instrumental motives, which are characterized by the seeker's desire for new information, reduced uncertainty, and improved task performance, are expected to be *positively* related to effort allocated toward a feedback episode. Conversely, image enhancement motives, which are characterized by the seeker's desire to improve and protect the source's opinion of the seeker, are expected to be *negatively* related to effort allocated to delivering feedback.

We tested our predictions across two complementary studies. In Study 1, we asked managers to reflect on a recent episode in which they had responded to a subordinate's request for feedback. Study 2 was an experiment in which participants acted as a manager providing feedback to a subordinate whose motives were manipulated. Altogether, the current research makes several important contributions to the feedback literature. First, by considering feedback-seeking from the source's perspective, we provide new insights as to how the feedback-seeking process may breakdown. Second, we extend the cost-value framework of feedback-seeking by applying it to feedback sources. As a result, we offer a theoretical approach that opens up new avenues to understanding feedback sources' behavior. Finally, although research indicates that high quality feedback is associated with better performance (e.g., Drouvelis & Paiardini, 2021), to date the feedback-seeking literature has tended to focus on *amount* of feedback sought. Thus, we also contribute to the literature by explicating the conditions under which high quality and interpersonally sensitive feedback is likely to be provided.

### **Feedback Seeking Behavior: The Cost-Value Framework**

Feedback-seeking behavior is defined as the devotion of energy toward obtaining information about one's past performance (Ashford et al., 2016). The dominant theoretical perspective in the feedback-seeking literature is the cost-value framework (e.g., Ashford, 1986). Generally, this approach stipulates that individuals are most likely to seek feedback when the perceived value of feedback is high, and when the perceived costs of seeking feedback are low. Said differently, feedback is most likely to be sought when the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs.

A significant body of research supports this framework. For instance, there is meta-analytic evidence of a positive relationship between learning goal orientations (LGO) and feedback-seeking (Payne et al., 2007). Strong LGO is characterized by an emphasis on personal growth and development. As such, these individuals tend to perceive feedback to be highly valuable (Park et al., 2007). Likewise, Payne et al. also observed a negative relationship between performance-avoid goal orientations (AGO) and feedback-seeking. High AGO individuals have a strong desire to avoid failure and appearing foolish. To this end, these individuals tend to perceive the costs of feedback-seeking to be high (Park et al., 2007).

In a similar vein, there is also meta-analytic evidence of a negative relationship between organizational tenure and feedback-seeking (Anseel et al., 2015). Relative to individuals with longer tenures, newcomers have limited access to information about their role and tasks, and thus, are likely to perceive value in seeking feedback. Likewise, it is generally acceptable for individuals to need time to "learn the ropes," meaning the potential costs of seeking feedback are also reduced for newcomers. Finally, individuals are most likely to seek feedback from sources who are perceived to be credible experts (Vancouver & Morrison, 1995), as well as individuals who enact transformational leadership behaviors (VandeWalle et al., 2000). Expert sources

possess task-relevant knowledge, and thus provide more valuable feedback than non-experts. By the same token, transformational leaders are likely to deliver feedback in manner that is sensitive, thereby limited ego-related costs to the seeker. Thus, as a whole, data generally support the cost-value framework for understanding feedback-seeking behavior.

Yet, to date this literature has primarily emphasized the feedback *seeker's* perspective, such that far less is known about this process from the feedback *source's* perspective (cf. Lam et al., 2007). We argue that similar to the way seekers assess the potential costs and benefits of *seeking* feedback, sources engage in a similar process when determining how much effort to allocate to *providing* feedback. In particular, we focus on managers as sources of feedback. Although feedback can be sought from other sources (e.g., coworkers, customers), we focus on managers because subordinate performance reflects directly on the manager (Manzoni & Barsoux, 1998). That is, subordinates perform tasks on behalf of their managers (Doorewaard et al., 2002), meaning managers are directly affected by the quality and quantity of their subordinates' work. Therefore, the effort that a manager puts toward delivering feedback is an *investment*, and as such, has the potential to pay dividends. However, managers must pursue multiple work-related goals at any given time (Kraut et al., 1989), so they must carefully consider how much effort to allocate to providing feedback. Below, we further explicate the process via which managers manage their allocation of effort toward feedback delivery.

### **Allocating Effort to the Delivery of Feedback as an Investment of Resources**

Providing feedback requires an investment of time, mental effort, emotional regulation, and other resources. Although ideally managers would always allocate considerable effort toward providing feedback, there are reasons to believe that this is likely not the case. In particular, a central tenet of the goal-prioritization literature is that individuals tend to prioritize

goals that are most likely to “pay off,” meaning resources like time and effort tend to be allocated toward goals with the highest perceived value and for which there is a non-zero perceived likelihood of success (e.g., Ballard et al., 2018; Beck et al., 2019; Schmidt & Dolis, 2009; Sun et al., 2014). Furthermore, resource scarcity can drive individuals to divert effort toward tasks that are deemed to be most pressing, and away from other tasks that are more perceived to be more discretionary (e.g., Beck & Schmidt, 2013; Rosen et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2019). Along these lines, we expect that responding to feedback requests can be perceived to be less critical relative to other managerial tasks (e.g., establishing budgets, setting schedules).

Indeed, previous research indicates that whereas control-oriented characteristics (e.g., agency) are typically considered necessities for leaders to possess, interpersonally-oriented characteristics (e.g., communality) are perceived to be more optional (Vial & Napier, 2018). Similarly, providing feedback is an interpersonal task, meaning allocating the effort necessary to providing high quality, interpersonally sensitive feedback may not always be a priority, particularly given other day-to-day demands managers face. Thus, based on findings from the goal prioritization literature, we predict that managers *strategically* allocate effort to feedback, saving resources for instances in which they believe that there will be a return on their investment. In other words, similar to feedback seekers, we posit that feedback sources are sensitive to the cost and value of *providing* feedback, and allocate their effort accordingly.

To this end, in the following section we turn our attention to the manager’s perceptions of the subordinate’s motives for seeking feedback. In particular, we predict that managers will form impressions of subordinates’ orientation to feedback (Braddy et al., 2013), and accordingly, invest effort based on their perceptions of *why* a subordinate is seeking feedback. Specifically,

we argue that a subordinate's perceived motives for seeking feedback drive beliefs regarding whether effort allocated toward feedback is ultimately likely to be well-spent versus squandered.

### **Feedback-Seeking Motives as Determinants of Effort Allocation**

In the current research, we focus our attention two common feedback-seeking motives: instrumental motives and image enhancement motives (Ashford et al., 2003; Dahling et al., 2015; Hays & Williams, 2011)<sup>4</sup>. Individuals with strong instrumental motives tend to seek more feedback than less instrumentally motivated individuals (Ashford, 1986; Gupta et al., 1999). More importantly, instrumental motives are positively associated with the tendency to seek negative feedback (Ashford et al., 2003). Thus, individuals with strong instrumental motives tend to seek feedback regarding how their performance can be improved. As such, investing effort in providing these employees with feedback is likely to be valuable and “pay off.”

On the other hand, feedback seekers motivated primarily by image-enhancement concerns tend to seek only positive feedback, or feedback for tasks for which they know they have performed well (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Morrison & Bies, 1991). For these individuals, improving their performance is not necessarily the goal of seeking feedback. Instead, feedback is sought as a way of ensuring others (e.g., the manager) are aware of the feedback seeker's previous (strong) performance. Hence, investing effort into delivering feedback to these employees is unlikely to yield improved performance, meaning such efforts are likely to be perceived to be a waste of limited resources.

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<sup>4</sup> When measuring perceived feedback-seeking motives, we also consider ego enhancement motives, which are characterized by a desire to be reassured about the quality of one's work or past behavior. However, relatively little empirical research has considered ego enhancement motives (Ashford et al., 2016). Further, research and theorizing on person perception indicates that perceivers' two dominant concerns center on cooperation vs. exploitation (which aligns with our focus on image enhancement motives) and level of competence (which aligns with our focus on instrumental motives; Cuddy et al., 2008). As a result, we anticipate that ego enhancement motives may not generally be as salient of a motive, particularly when interacting with unfamiliar individuals (as in Study 2). Thus, although we developed a measure of enhancement motives in our current study for completeness, we do not make a priori hypotheses regarding its impact on feedback source's effort or include it in our focal studies.



Consequently, we expect managers' perceptions of feedback seekers' motives to guide the effort allocated to delivering feedback. Indeed, research in the broader impression management literature indicates that the perceived motives of employee behaviors are salient to leaders and can affect relationships between leaders and followers (e.g., Chen et al., 2021). Yet, the degree to which a manager's perceptions of a subordinate's feedback-seeking motives align with a subordinate's *actual* motives is an open question. For instance, Dahling and Whitaker (2016) found image enhancement feedback-seeking motives (reported by the subordinate) to be positively related to supervisor performance ratings, but this was only the case for individuals with relatively high levels of political skill. These results indicate that feedback seeker's motives may not always be accurately perceived by the feedback source, as feedback seekers with strong political skills were presumably able to hide their image enhancement motives. Nonetheless, regardless of their accuracy, we expect *perceived* feedback motives to influence effort allocation.

Support for this argument comes from two studies conducted by Lam et al. (2007). These authors observed a positive relationship between the amount of feedback sought by a subordinate and the quality of the subordinate's relationship with his or her supervisor (i.e., leader-member exchange [LMX]; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Yet, this main effect was moderated by the supervisor's perceptions of the feedback seeker's motives. Specifically, feedback-seeking was more strongly (and positively) related to LMX among subordinates who were perceived to have strong instrumental motives (which Lam et al. labeled "performance enhancement"), relative to subordinates with weak instrumental motives. Likewise, feedback-seeking was more strongly related to LMX among subordinates with weak perceived image enhancement motives (which Lam et al. labeled "impression management"), relative to subordinates with strong image enhancement motives. These studies indicate that regardless of whether managers are accurate in

their assessment of their subordinates' feedback-seeking motives, managers do form perceptions of subordinates' motives, and these perceptions shape subsequent interactions with subordinates.

The current research builds on Lam et al.'s (2007) studies in several important ways. Most critically, whereas Lam et al. studied the effects of subordinate feedback-seeking motives on LMX, the purpose of the current research is to understand variance in the amount of *effort* that managers allocate toward providing feedback. Although it may be reasonable to expect that managers will allocate more effort when feedback is sought from a subordinate with whom the manager has a high quality relationship, this is not necessarily the case. For instance, managers may feel highly confident in their ability to convey feedback to subordinates with whom they feel high LMX, yet high confidence can actually result in effort being diverted *away* from the task at hand (e.g., Beck & Schmidt, 2018; Schmidt & DeShon, 2010; Yeo & Neal, 2004). Thus, it is important to directly consider effort allocated toward delivering feedback.

Similarly, Lam et al. (2007) did not consider managers' perceptions of subordinates' feedback-seeking motives for a specific feedback episode, but instead measured managers' *overall* perceptions of these motives. However, goal prioritization is a dynamic process in which individuals adjust the amount of time and energy allocated toward a goal based on the characteristics of specific situations (Neal et al., 2017; Unsworth et al., 2014). Thus, effort allocated toward a given feedback episode is likely to be influenced by perceptions regarding the feedback seeker's motives in that instance. To this end, we put forth the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The amount of effort allocated toward a feedback episode by the feedback source will be *positively* related to his or her perceptions of the feedback seeker's *instrumental* feedback-seeking motives.

*Hypothesis 2:* The amount of effort allocated toward a feedback episode by the feedback source will be *negatively* related to his or her perceptions of the feedback seeker's *image enhancement* feedback-seeking motives.

Finally, it is important to note that feedback-seeking motives are continua and are not mutually exclusive, meaning it is possible that a manager may perceive a feedback seeker to hold some degree of both image enhancement *and* instrumental motives. Thus, in addition to the main effects hypothesized above, we expect that there will be an interaction between perceived instrumental feedback-seeking motives and perceived image enhancement feedback-seeking motives on the level of effort allocated by the manager to providing feedback. Although managers may be willing to invest high levels of effort into providing instrumentally motivated subordinates with feedback because they calculate this effort as likely to result in benefits, they may be less likely to do so if they perceive that the subordinate is also highly motivated by image enhancement and consequent fears that such investments may ultimately be squandered.

Specifically, social cognition research indicates that individuals are often more sensitive to information suggesting that others are disingenuous, relative to information suggesting that individuals hold ethically pure motives (Fiske et al., 2007). This negativity bias emerges due to evolutionary pressures that favor caution when assessing another person's motives in interpersonal interactions, along with a general cognitive tendency to focus on negatives over positives (i.e., "bad is stronger than good" effect; Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). In other words, in the presence of both strong instrumental *and* image enhancement motives, the potential value of perceived instrumental motives will be washed out by the more salient costs of the high level of perceived image enhancement motives.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceived image enhancement motives will moderate the relationship between perceived instrumental motives and effort. As perceived image enhancement motives increase, the positive relationship between perceived instrumental motives and effort will be attenuated.

## **Study 1**

We recruited a sample of managers from a range of industries and asked them to reflect on a recent episode in which they had responded to a subordinate's request for feedback. Before conducting Study 1, we developed and validated a measure designed to assess perceived feedback-seeking motives from the feedback source's perspective. We provide more details about this measure below, and the complete description of the development of this scale is provided in the supplemental online materials (SOM).

## **Method**

### *Sample*

Participants were recruited to complete three separate surveys. We prescreened 2,000 potential participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) using the following item: "Are you currently a manager at work?" Six-hundred and twenty (31%) individuals answered "yes" and were invited to participate.<sup>5</sup> We randomly allocated two-thirds of this pool of managers ( $N = 414$ ) to participate in Study 1. The remaining one-third ( $N = 206$ ) of the managers in this pool were allocated to the scale development phase of this research, which is described in the SOM.

Of the 414 managers invited to participate, 193 completed all three surveys (retention rate = 46%). Participants who completed all three surveys did not differ from those who did not in age,  $t(253) = 1.09$ ,  $SE = 1.66$ ,  $p = .275$ , gender,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.94$ ,  $p = .586$ , or managerial experience,  $t(253) = .54$ ,  $SE = .46$ ,  $p = .462$ . An additional 19 participants were excluded on the basis of failed attention checks or duplicate responding (Cheung et al., 2017; Meade & Craig, 2012). Therefore, the final sample consisted of 174 managers. The majority of the final sample was

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to this focal screening question, participants were asked several other questions about their employment experiences (e.g., "Are you currently self-employed?"). This was done to ensure that our screening criterion was not obvious, thereby limiting the prospect of potential participants providing false information for the purpose of gaining access to the study. Additionally, the study was only visible to individuals residing in the United States with a 95% MTurk approval rating based on at least 100 HITs.

male (60%) and Caucasian (71%). The sample had a mean age of 40.09 years ( $SD = 11.54$ ), and an average of 8.18 years ( $SD = 7.39$ ) of managerial experience. Participants were paid \$1.00 USD for completing each survey, and a \$2.00 USD bonus if they completed all three surveys.

### ***Procedure***

Data were collected across three time points spanning one workweek (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). Separation of measurement periods was done to reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). During the first survey, participants reported demographic information and completed exploratory measures of individual differences.<sup>6</sup>

During the second survey, participants provided a brief written description of the most recent instance during which one of their subordinates had sought feedback from them. We did not restrict participants to report on any specific time period, yet most participants ( $N = 155$ , 80%) reported on a feedback episode that had occurred within the previous 30 days. To ensure participants were reporting on an actual feedback episode, participants were asked to report the initials of the subordinate who had asked for feedback, as well as the approximate date on which this instance had occurred. Next, we asked participants to write short descriptions about the topic that the subordinate had asked them for feedback about and the tasks the manager had been completing when the subordinate sought feedback. Finally, participants completed the measure of perceived feedback-seeking motives in relation to the feedback episode they had described.

Lastly, during the third survey, participants were shown their descriptions of the feedback episode from the previous survey in order to ensure they were reporting on the same episode.

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<sup>6</sup> Individual differences collected were implicit person theory (Dweck, 2000), self-monitoring (Wilmot et al., 2017), and political skill (Ferris et al., 2007). These variables were collected for exploratory purposes and are therefore not discussed further. However, a correlation matrix including these individual differences, as well as perceived ego enhancement motives, is presented in the SOM (Table SOM.4).

This also served the purpose of helping the manager to recall the episode. Participants then reported the amount of effort they had put into giving feedback during that instance.

### **Measures**

**Perceived feedback-seeking motives.** We measured perceived feedback-seeking motives using a scale that was developed for this research. Participants rated their agreement with several statements regarding the reasons their subordinate had asked them for feedback on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Prior to conducting the current research, we validated this scale using two separate samples of managers. First, we conducted a content validation study. A sample of managers were provided definitions of each feedback-seeking motive and were asked to categorize each item according to the definitions. Items that were correctly categorized by a majority of managers were retained. Second, we administered the remaining items to another sample of managers. We used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to reduce the pool of items down to the final scale. A complete description of these two validation studies is provided in the SOM.

The final scale consisted of five instrumental motive items ( $\alpha = .65$ ) and four image enhancement items ( $\alpha = .88$ ).<sup>7</sup> A sample item from the instrumental motives scale was “wanted to improve their job-related skills,” and a sample item from the image enhancement scale was “knew it would enhance the way you saw them.” The full scale is included in Appendix A.

**Effort.** We used a four-item ( $\alpha = .83$ ) measure that was originally developed by Schmidt and DeShon (2010). We adapted the items to match the context of the current research. Sample

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<sup>7</sup> We also included three items to measure the ego enhancement factor for scale development purposes. As a final validation step, we conduct a confirmatory factor analysis using the data from the current study. The three-factor solution fit the data well ( $CFI = .912$ ,  $RMSEA = .083$ ). Furthermore, the three-factor model was a better fit than several plausible alternative factor structures (e.g., a one factor solution;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 228.67$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CFI = .591$ ,  $RMSEA = .175$ ).

items included “I pushed myself to give good quality feedback” and “I put a great deal of effort into giving feedback.”

## Results

### *Measurement Model and Descriptive Statistics*

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the adequacy of our measurement model. The three-factor model (instrumental motives, image enhancement motives, effort) provided a good fit to the data ( $CFI = .916$ ,  $RMSEA = .078$ ). As shown in Table 1, the three-factor model also fit the data significantly better than several alternative models, all of which did not fit the data well. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 2.

### *Hypothesis Testing*

We centered predictors around their respective means to facilitate interpretation of the main effects (Cohen et al., 2003). The full regression model results are summarized in Table 3. In support of  $H1$ , perceived instrumental motives were significantly and positively related to effort ( $b = .21$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .009$ ). We also found support for  $H2$ , such that perceived image enhancement motives were significantly and negatively related to effort ( $b = -.11$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .036$ ). However, we did not find support for  $H3$ . Although the interaction term between perceived instrumental and image enhancement motives was statistically significant ( $b = .15$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .029$ ), simple slopes revealed that the nature of the interaction was not as we hypothesized. Specifically, we predicted that the positive relationship between perceived instrumental motives and effort would be attenuated by higher perceived image enhancement motives. However, the opposite pattern was observed (see Figure 1), such that the simple slope of perceived instrumental motives predicting effort was *stronger* at higher (+1  $SD$ ) levels of

perceived image enhancement motives,  $b = .39$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p < .001$ , relative to lower (-1 *SD*) levels of perceived image enhancement motives,  $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .226$ .<sup>8</sup>

## Discussion

In general, the results of Study 1 supported our predictions. Managers adjusted the effort they allocated to providing feedback according to the perceived motives of the feedback seeker. Specifically, managers invested more effort into providing feedback to subordinates who were perceived to have sought feedback for stronger instrumental motives, relative to subordinates with weaker instrumental motives. Likewise, managers allocated less effort to providing feedback to subordinates who were perceived to have strong image enhancement motives, relative to subordinates who were thought to be less motivated by image enhancement. Yet, strong perceived image enhancement motives did not attenuate the positive relationship between perceived instrumental motives and effort. Rather, managers reported allocating relatively high levels of effort, as long as subordinates were not perceived to have strong image enhancement motives *and* weak instrumental motives.

Despite the support for our predictions, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. For one, it is possible that the retrospective nature of our study affected participants' responses. Managers may only have remembered putting forth lower levels of effort when the subordinate's perceived motives were seen as particularly driven by image enhancement, and otherwise reported higher levels of effort. Additionally, Study 1's correlational design precludes us from drawing strong inferences regarding the causal effect of perceived feedback-seeking motives on effort allocation. Thus, we designed Study 2 to address these limitations.

## Study 2

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<sup>8</sup> We also conducted hypothesis tests including ego enhancement motives as an exploratory variable. These results are presented in the SOM.



In Study 2, participants completed a work simulation in which they acted as the manager of an advertising agency. As part of this simulation, participants provided written feedback to a fictional subordinate. We manipulated the fictional subordinate's motives for seeking feedback, and we evaluated effort by coding the *quality* and *sensitivity* of participants' written responses to the feedback request. Therefore, by manipulating feedback-seeking motives, Study 2 allows for stronger causal inferences than could be made from Study 1. Also, rather than relying on self-reported effort, in Study 2 we inferred effort from participants' behavior.

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

Participants with managerial experience were recruited from MTurk, excluding individuals who had participated in Study 1. Prior to the study, participants were asked: "Are you currently, or have you ever been, a manager at work?" Participants who answered "yes" to this question were allowed to continue to the study.<sup>9</sup> Five-hundred and twenty participants completed the experiment. However, 159 participants were excluded from the analyses for failure to follow instructions. This relatively high number of exclusions is not entirely surprising, given that writing tasks are more time consuming and cognitively demanding compared to providing multiple-choice responses. An additional two cases were excluded due to duplicate responding, leaving a final sample of  $N = 359$ . This sample was 61% male, 72% Caucasian, had a mean age of 36.91 years ( $SD = 10.05$ ), and an average of 6.16 years ( $SD = 5.56$ ) of managerial experience. Participants were paid \$1.00 USD for simply completing the study, and were told they were also eligible for two bonuses (up to \$4.00 USD), which are described in greater detail below.

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<sup>9</sup> Similar to Study 1, participants were asked two additional questions about their employment experiences to help ensure that the screening criterion was not obvious. Specifically, participants were also asked "Do you currently, or have you ever, worked abroad?" and "Are you currently, or have you ever been, self-employed?" Likewise, participation was restricted to U.S. residents with a 95% MTurk approval rating based on at least 500 HITs.

### ***Procedure***

Participants completed a work simulation in which they performed three common managerial tasks: scheduling, budgeting, and providing feedback to a subordinate. Importantly, participants were given 15 minutes total to complete all three tasks. The tasks had to be completed in the order in which they were presented, and participants could not return to a task once they moved to the next task. Otherwise, participants were free to allocate their time across the three tasks as they saw fit. The budgeting and scheduling tasks were included as filler tasks designed to simulate the competing demands that managers face. Participants were randomly assigned to complete either the budgeting task or the scheduling task first. All participants performed the focal feedback task second, which is described in detail in the Experimental Task and Manipulations section. Following the feedback task, participants completed the filler task that they had not already completed. Finally, participants reported demographic information.

To incentivize allocating effort to the tasks, participants were informed that they were eligible to receive two cash bonuses based on their performance. First, participants would receive a \$3.00 USD bonus for following the study instructions. All participants who responded to the feedback task with relevant text were awarded this bonus. Second, participants were told that the top 35% of performers would receive a \$1.00 USD bonus. Participants were told that the three tasks would be weighted equally in determining their overall performance, and that both the speed and quality of their work would be taken into consideration. However, because we were only interested in the feedback that participants provided, in reality all participants who received the \$3.00 USD bonus for following instructions also received the \$1.00 USD performance bonus.

### ***Experimental Task and Manipulations***

For the feedback task, participants were shown an email from a fictional subordinate named Joe. In the email, Joe asked for feedback regarding a new logo he had created for a customer. Participants were told to “provide Joe with feedback on anything you see fit about the logo (e.g., color scheme, style, imagery, font, etc.)” The email and logo are shown in Appendices B and C, respectively. Prior to reading the email, participants were told to imagine they had been supervising Joe for three years, and that his job performance is “generally middle of the pack.” Following the email, participants were randomly assigned to see one of four short descriptions detailing Joe’s feedback-seeking history. Thus, this study used a 2 (instrumental feedback-seeking motive: weak vs. strong) x 2 (image enhancement feedback-seeking motive: weak vs. strong) between-subjects design. Instrumental feedback-seeking motives were manipulated by providing information about whether Joe has implemented feedback provided in the past to improve his performance. Likewise, image enhancement feedback motives were manipulated by providing information about whether or not Joe appears to be “bragging” or “looking for praise” by seeking feedback. The full manipulations are provided in Appendix B.

We validated these manipulations in an independent sample of managers ( $N = 168$ ) by regressing perceived feedback-seeking motives on these manipulations ( $-1 = \text{weak}; 1 = \text{strong}$ ). As anticipated, perceived instrumental motives were positively related to the instrumental motive condition ( $b = .19, SE = .06, p < .001$ ), yet unrelated to the image enhancement condition ( $b = -.06, SE = .06, p = .233$ ). Likewise, perceived image enhancement motives were positively related to the image enhancement motive condition ( $b = .52, SE = .07, p < .001$ ) and unrelated to the image enhancement condition ( $b = -.09, SE = .07, p = .167$ ). Therefore, the manipulations functioned as intended. A full description of this validation study is provided in the SOM.

### ***Measures***

We rated the quality and sensitivity of the feedback that participants delivered. These ratings served as indicators of the level of effort that participants put into providing feedback. We conducted a pilot study to justify our use of feedback quality and sensitivity as indicators of effort. Participants ( $N = 74$ ) with managerial experience read four vignettes, each describing a scenario in which a manager responded to a request for feedback. Each vignette described either low quality, high quality, low sensitivity, or high sensitivity feedback. Participants reported the amount of effort that would be required to provide each type of feedback. As expected, participants indicated that providing high-quality feedback required more effort ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) relative to low quality feedback ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $t(219) = 3.31$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = .54$ ). Likewise, participants indicated that providing highly sensitive feedback required more effort ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) relative to providing relatively insensitive feedback ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ,  $t(219) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = .42$ ). A full description of this pilot study is provided in the SOM.

To rate the quality and sensitivity of each feedback message, we began by compiling a file containing only the feedback message and the participant identification number; this file contained no information about the condition to which the participant was assigned. Next, the first and second authors screened the written feedback for inattentive responses. Responses were retained if they met the following criteria: the feedback provided was original text, the feedback included an evaluation of either the target of the feedback (i.e., the logo) or the employee seeking feedback (i.e., Joe), and the feedback message was coherent. Initial agreement between the two coders was 95.96%, and the remaining discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Finally, the first author and a research assistant who was blind to the hypotheses independently coded the retained responses for quality and sensitivity. Each rater indicated their level of agreement with 13 (eight quality, five sensitivity) statements regarding the feedback message.

**Feedback Quality.** The quality of participants' feedback was rated using five items from the Quality sub-scale of the Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman et al., 2004). These items were adapted to fit the specific feedback context of our study. We also assessed quality using three additional items that were written for this study. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items included "This feedback would be helpful to Joe" and "Overall, this feedback is of high quality."

Each participant's feedback message was rated by both the first author (Rater 1) and the research assistant (Rater 2) on all eight feedback quality items. Next, we computed the correlation between the ratings for each of the eight statements. For instance, Rater 1's response to Item 1 was correlated with Rater 2's response to Item 1, and so on for each of the eight items. Then, composite scores for each of the eight items were computed by averaging across the two raters (e.g.,  $C1 = [Rater_1Item_1 + Rater_2Item_1] / 2$ ). However, we decided a priori only to retain composites with an interrater reliability of .65 or higher. Because the correlation between two ratings provides an estimate of the reliability of a single rater (Ghiselli et al., 1981), we used the Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula to correct the bivariate correlations between the ratings to estimate the reliability of each composite item. Specifically, we used  $N = 2$  as the correction factor to account for the fact that we used two raters. As shown in Table 4, seven out of the eight feedback quality items had interrater reliability estimates above the .65 cut-off.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the feedback quality scale was computed as the mean of these seven composite scores.

**Feedback Sensitivity.** Sensitivity was coded using a version of the five-item Delivery sub-scale of the Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman et al., 2004), which was adapted to our

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<sup>10</sup> We also conducted the analyses for Study 2 using only the items with an interrater reliability above .70. Adjusting the cut-off to .70 results in one fewer feedback sensitivity item, however, the results are the same regardless of whether this item is included or not. Therefore, we retained this item and the a priori cut-off of .65.

context. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items are: “This person was supportive when giving Joe feedback about his job performance” and “This person was tactful when giving Joe performance feedback.”

The same procedure as described above was repeated with the feedback sensitivity items. After assessing the inter-rater reliability of each item, four of the five items intended to assess feedback sensitivity were retained (see Table 4). The sensitivity scale was computed by averaging these four delivery composite indicators together into a single factor.

**Word Count.** We included word count of the feedback provided as a control variable in all analyses. Although the raters were blind to the participants’ conditions, they could nonetheless easily see the length of each feedback message. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that longer feedback messages may be perceived as requiring greater effort, regardless of content. For instance, letter of recommendation length is positively related to job applicant ratings (e.g., Kleinke, 1978), meaning individuals likely perceive long letters as a signal of the effort letter-writers are willing to expend on the applicant’s behalf (Bangerter et al., 2012). However, it requires effort to ensure feedback is clear, concise, and free from extraneous details. Thus, although individuals may perceive longer feedback messages to require more effort, this is not necessarily the case, and indeed, the opposite may be true. To this end, we controlled for word count when testing our hypotheses to remove any such contamination. We divided word count by ten to facilitate interpretation of the regression weights (Cohen et al., 2003).

## **Results**

### ***Measurement Model and Descriptive Statistics***

Before testing our hypotheses, we assessed whether quality and sensitivity ratings were most appropriately treated as a single factor, or as two distinct factors. To do so, we conducted a

CFA. The two-factor solution ( $CFI = .972$ ,  $RMSEA = .103$ ) provided an adequate fit to the data, and fit significantly better than the one-factor solution ( $CFI = .636$ ,  $RMSEA = .368$ ,  $\Delta\chi^2 = 1974.11$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, we treated quality and sensitivity as unique dependent variables. Descriptive statistics and correlations are shown in Table 5. Notably, feedback quality and feedback sensitivity were moderately correlated ( $r = .37$ ), providing support for our treatment of these variables as interrelated, yet distinct, indicators of effort.

### *Hypothesis Testing*

**Feedback quality.** We regressed feedback quality on word count, instrumental condition (low = -1, high = 1), image enhancement condition (low = -1, high = 1), and the interaction term (see Table 6). In support of *H1*, there was a significant positive effect of the instrumental condition variable on feedback quality ( $b = .09$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .042$ ), such that participants gave higher quality feedback to a hypothetical employee who was perceived to have stronger instrumental motives, relative to a hypothetical employee with weaker perceived instrumental motives. Additionally, we found support for *H2*, as the image enhancement variable was significantly negatively related to feedback quality ( $b = -.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .017$ ). Specifically, participants gave lower quality feedback to a hypothetical employee who was perceived to have stronger image enhancement motives, relative to a hypothetical employee with weaker perceived image enhancement motives. Lastly, we did not find support for *H3*, as the interaction between instrumental condition and image enhancement condition did not significantly predict feedback quality ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .477$ ).

For the sake of completeness, we also tested our hypotheses without controlling for word count. As shown in Table 6, when word count was not included in the model, the effect of the image enhancement condition on feedback quality was no longer statistically significant ( $b = -$

.08,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .128$ ). However, as noted above, word count may contaminate quality ratings by signaling a high degree of effort, despite the fact that providing *concise* feedback requires considerable effort. This contamination may attenuate the relationship between quality ratings and the manipulation dummy variable, meaning it is more appropriate to test our hypotheses with variance in word count removed. Thus, although the results are dependent on including word count as a control variable, we interpret the data as providing support for H2.

**Feedback sensitivity.** The instrumental condition variable was also significantly positively related to feedback sensitivity ( $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .025$ ), providing additional support for H1 (see Table 7). However, we did not find support for H2 or H3, in that neither image enhancement condition ( $b = .04$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .517$ ) nor the interaction between conditions ( $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .062$ )<sup>11</sup> were significant predictors of feedback sensitivity. Finally, as shown in Table 7, the interpretation of these hypothesis tests are not dependent on whether or not word count is included as a control variable.

## Discussion

Study 2 provides additional support for our argument that feedback sources use their perceptions of feedback seekers' motives when determining the level of effort to allocate to providing feedback. As in Study 1, we found support for H1 in that instrumental motives were positively related to both the quality and the sensitivity of the feedback given. Support for H2 was more tentative. Whereas perceived image enhancement motives were negatively related to feedback quality, this effect was dependent on including word count as a control variable, and the image enhancement manipulation had no significant effect on the sensitivity with which

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<sup>11</sup> Given the  $p < .10$  significance level, we probed this interaction for the sake of completeness. As was the case in Study 1, the form of this interaction did not match our predictions. Likewise, the form of the interaction did not replicate the interaction observed in Study 1. Thus, we do not consider this interaction further.



feedback was delivered. Further, the two motives did not interact to determine level of effort exerted by the supervisor, meaning H3 was not supported. Nonetheless, on the whole, this pattern of results supports the central premise of this article; specifically, managers adjust the effort they put toward delivering feedback as a function of perceived feedback seekers' motives.

As for the lack of a significant relationship between image enhancement motives and the sensitivity with which feedback was delivered in the current study, we suggest that there is likely a base level of courtesy with which managers tend to deliver feedback. For the most part, managers are motivated to avoid coming across as “rude” or “harsh” when delivering feedback (Levy & Williams, 2004). Thus, whereas a manager may *upwardly* adjust the level of effort he or she puts toward delivering feedback sensitively when delivering feedback to a subordinate who is perceived to be particularly instrumentally motivated, perceived image enhancement motives may not generate a corresponding *downward* adjustment in sensitivity. Although sensitivity may not be affected, our results suggest strong perceived instrumental motives are likely to lead to an increase in the quality of the feedback that the feedback seeker is likely to receive.

### **General Discussion**

Feedback-seeking allows employees to gather information about their current level of performance, and ideally, can result in improved performance over time. However, meta-analytic evidence suggests that feedback-seeking does not uniformly improve performance (Anseel et al., 2015). Building on these findings, we argued that managers may sometimes not put the level of effort into feedback seeking necessary for improving subordinate performance. Rather, managers allocate effort strategically based on the feedback seeker's motives, which reflect the potential value of providing feedback. The results of two empirical studies with complementary methodologies supported this argument. Thus, the current research makes an important

contribution to the feedback-seeking literature. Namely, most feedback-seeking research has emphasized the seeker's perspective, and relatively little is known about this process from the source's perspective (cf. Lam et al., 2007). The current research addresses this omission.

### **Theoretical Implications**

In the same way feedback seekers evaluate the costs and value associated with seeking feedback (Ashford et al., 2003), we argue that feedback sources undergo a similar process. Providing feedback is inherently costly, as doing so requires effort. Furthermore, managers pursue multiple goals at work, all of which compete for their resources. To justify allocating the high levels of effort needed to provide high quality and highly sensitive feedback, the value of doing so must outweigh the costs. Thus, we integrated the cost-value framework with self-regulatory theories, and did so from the feedback source's perspective. Although self-regulatory frameworks have been used to understand feedback processes in the past (e.g., Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Taylor et al., 1984), this was primary from the feedback recipient's perspective. By considering the feedback source's perspective, the current research lays important groundwork for understanding the antecedents of the effort that managers allocate to providing feedback. This perspective provides opportunities for understanding why feedback delivery is sometimes sub-optimal, and how this process can be improved.

For instance, in the current research we argued that managers are motivated to see a "return" on their investment of effort toward allocating feedback in the form of subordinate performance. In self-regulatory terms, the *goal* being pursued is "improving subordinate performance," which is being pursued via providing feedback (i.e., feedback is the *means* to pursue this goal). To this end, we argued that feedback-seeking motives were used to gauge the *value* of this means (feedback) for pursuing this goal (improved subordinate performance). Yet,

feedback may serve as a means to other goals as well, thereby changing the degree to which feedback seeker motives are relevant for determining effort. As an example, it may be the case that some managers may be motivated by a sense of obligation to allocate effort toward feedback delivery (e.g., “It’s my job”), whereas others may be motivated by a desire to “give back” or mentor their subordinates, regardless of whether the subordinate’s subsequent performance ultimately benefits the manager. Thus, delivering high quality feedback can hold value for reasons beyond improved subordinate performance. Future research should explore the degree to which managers are guided by additional goals (i.e., motives) when providing feedback. That is, whereas a great deal of research has emphasized motives for *seeking* feedback, we encourage future research to explore motives for *delivering* feedback.

Finally, we argued that delivering feedback when it is requested from subordinates may be seen as less focal than other managerial tasks (e.g., scheduling). In particular, we are arguing that the value associated with delivering feedback may be lower than the value associated with other tasks. However, this assumption warrants further research; indeed, we expect the value attached to delivering feedback to vary across occupations as well as individual managers. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, delivering feedback may serve as a means to a variety of goals, some of which are likely to be more important than others. For instance, individuals tend to favor obligations over other goals when allocating resources (Shah et al., 2002). This may be the case for jobs for which delivering feedback is a central feature (e.g., managing interns or trainees). Furthermore, higher-level goals such as “giving back” are expected to be more closely tied to one’s identity, compared to lower level goals, such as improving subordinate performance (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Lord & Levy, 1994). We expect more effort to be allocated to delivering feedback when doing so is seen as a means to higher-, relative to lower-level goals.

## **Practical Implications**

The current research has practical implications for both subordinates who seek feedback, as well as managers who deliver feedback. For one, the results suggest that feedback seekers should carefully consider their reasons for seeking feedback prior to approaching their manager. Previous research indicates that feedback sought for the purpose of managing impressions may ultimately have the opposite of the desired effect (Dahling & Whitaker, 2016; Lam et al., 2007). The current research adds to these findings by demonstrating that managers are likely to reduce the effort put toward allocating feedback to a subordinate who is perceived to be motivated by image enhancement concerns, relative to other subordinates. Nonetheless, managers may not always be accurate judges of a subordinate's feedback-seeking motives. Therefore, subordinates who are hoping to receive a high quality, effortful response to their request for feedback should do what they can to communicate strong instrumental motives, and to the degree possible, avoid sending any signals that they are motivated by image enhancement concerns.

Regarding managers and other sources of feedback, our results suggest that it may be necessary to question assumptions about a subordinate's motives for seeking feedback. As noted in the previous paragraph, managers' impressions of a feedback seeker's motives may be inaccurate. Thus, it may be wise for managers to seek additional clarity from their subordinates when feedback is sought. For instance, a manager who misinterprets a subordinate's genuine desire to improve his or her performance as impression management may miss the opportunity to help that subordinate develop. On the other hand, some subordinates, particularly those who are particularly politically skilled, may be able to hide image enhancement motives when seeking feedback (Dahling & Whitaker, 2016). Therefore, managers risk both under- and over-allocating effort to delivering feedback based on faulty assumptions of the seeker's motives. Thus, brief

follow-up conversations to further probe these motives may help managers to effectively calibrate their response.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The use of multiple, complementary research methods is a primary strength of the current research. By employing both a field survey and an experimental study design, we were able to balance the limitations of each method with the strengths of the other. That is, Study 1 allowed us to observe the relationship between perceived feedback-seeking motives and effort within a natural setting, in which managers and subordinates have long-term, interdependent relationships. Yet, the use of self-reported, retrospective measures in Study 1 represent an important limitation. Most importantly, we are unable to make causal inferences regarding the relationship between perceived feedback-seeking motives and effort based on the data from Study 1 alone. It is possible that participants who recalled allocating a low level of effort during the feedback episode may have reported perceiving their subordinate to have weak instrumental motives, strong image enhancement motives, or both in order to justify their effort allocation. To this end, we balanced these limitations by using an experimental methodology in Study 2.

Specifically, by manipulating feedback-seeking motives and randomly assigning participants to conditions, we were able to infer a causal effect of feedback-seeking motives on effort. However, the experimental methodology used in Study 2 carries its own limitations. In particular, Study 2 was devoid of important features inherent in actual feedback-seeking episodes (e.g., interpersonal factors). In some ways this limited context is a strength, as it limits extraneous effects on the focal variables. Nonetheless, the experimental nature of Study 2 likely over-simplified the relationship between perceived feedback-seeking motives and feedback source's effort. Fortunately, this limitation is offset by the methodology used in Study 1.

Another important limitation of the current research is that we were not able to speak to the degree to which the effort that managers allocated to providing feedback translated into improved subordinate performance. Doing so would likely require tracking manager-subordinate dyads over a period of time, and as such, was beyond the scope of the current research. However, a positive relationship between effort allocation and task performance, albeit often with diminishing returns, has been established within a variety of other domains (e.g., Beck & Schmidt, 2018; Yeo & Neal, 2004). Thus, we expect feedback delivery to follow a similar pattern. Nonetheless, it will be important for future research to assess the relationship between the effort allocated to delivering feedback to subordinates and their subsequent performance.

Finally, some readers may question the appropriateness of using MTurk to recruit participants for a study of managerial behavior. However, it is important to note that we restricted participation to individuals who were either currently working as a manager (Study 1) or had managerial experience (Study 2). Likewise, although MTurk workers differ from the general population on some characteristics (e.g., greater education; Keith et al., 2017), MTurk workers generally do not think or behave differently than other individuals. For instance, MTurk workers exhibit typical reactions and biases to various decision-making scenarios (Goodman et al., 2013), and correlations between common work attitudes within samples of MTurk workers are similar to meta-analytic estimates (Michel et al., 2017). Lastly, it is important to note that organizational samples (which are also convenience samples) are not the “gold standard” for organizational science (Landers & Behrend, 2015). Indeed, nearly all organizational samples are subject to range restriction and omitted variables. These threats to external validity are often less problematic in samples drawn from MTurk, as participants can be distributed across different

organizations and industries. Thus, we argue that our results are indeed likely to generalize beyond the managers included in our samples.

### **Conclusion**

Across two studies, we found evidence that feedback sources vary the amount of effort they allocate to providing feedback based on their perception of the feedback seeker's motives. Specifically, whereas strong instrumental motives were associated with increased effort, strong image enhancement motives were associated with less effort. This pattern of results indicates that feedback sources allocate their time and energy strategically, allocating the most effort to providing feedback to subordinates for whom doing so is likely to reap dividends. Importantly, these studies are among the first to consider the feedback-seeking process from the source's perspective. We believe doing so is imperative for understanding the effectiveness of feedback as performance management tool.

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Table 1

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Study 1 Measurement Model*

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	<i>p</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>CFI</i>
One factor	472.52	65	344.69	3	<.001	.190	.481
Two factor (IE + Inst vs. Effort)	219.73	64	91.90	2	<.001	.118	.802
Two factor (IE + Effort vs. Inst)	386.21	64	258.38	2	<.001	.170	.590
Two factor (Effort + Inst. vs. IE)	219.21	64	91.38	2	<.001	.118	.802
Three factor	127.83	62				.078	.916

*Note.* *N* = 174. IE = Image Enhancement, Inst= Instrumental. Changes in chi-squared and degrees of freedom are in reference to the three-factor model.

Table 2

*Study 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Instrumental	3.80	.64	<i>.65</i>		
2. Image Enhancement	2.82	.97	.13 †	<i>.88</i>	
3. Effort	4.26	.70	.18 *	-.13 †	<i>.83</i>

*Note.*  $N = 174$ . Alpha coefficients are italicized and presented on the diagonal. † $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Significance tests are two-tailed.

Table 3

*Relationships Between Perceived Feedback-Seeking Motives and Self-Reported Effort (Study 1)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1					.06	—
Intercept	4.26	.05	82.56	<.001		
Instrumental	.21	.08	2.63	.009		
Image Enhancement	-.11	.05	-2.12	.036		
Step 2					.08	.03
Intercept	4.25	.05	82.79	<.001		
Instrumental	.25	.08	3.04	.003		
Image Enhancement	-.11	.05	-2.13	.035		
Instrumental $\times$ Image Enhancement	.15	.07	2.20	.029		

*Note.* *N* = 174. All predictors are centered around their respective means. Significance tests are two-tailed.

Table 4

*Inter-Rater Reliability of Quality and Sensitivity Items*

Item	$r_{xx}$	Construct
Joe would consider this to be useful feedback about his job performance.*	.72	Quality
This feedback would be helpful to Joe.*	.75	Quality
Joe would value this feedback.*	.73	Quality
This feedback would help Joe do his job.*	.73	Quality
Joe would consider this performance information to be generally meaningful.	.61	Quality
This feedback is specific.*	.81	Quality
This feedback offered Joe a solution.*	.77	Quality
Overall, this feedback is of high quality.*	.81	Quality
This person was supportive when giving Joe feedback about his job performance.*	.71	Sensitivity
When this person gave Joe performance feedback, he or she was considerate of Joe's feelings.*	.75	Sensitivity
This person generally provided feedback in a thoughtless manner. (reverse-coded)	.37	Sensitivity
This person did not treat Joe very well when providing performance feedback. (reverse-coded)*	.79	Sensitivity
This person was tactful when giving Joe performance feedback.*	.67	Sensitivity

*Note.* \*Retained item.  $r_{xx}$  = Spearman Brown corrected inter-rater reliability between two raters.

Table 5

*Study 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1. Word Count	5.57	3.41					
2. Instrumental Condition	.10	1.00	.08				
3. Image Enhancement Condition	.00	1.00	.02	-.14 **			
4. Quality	3.55	1.03	.59 ***	.15 **	-.10 †	.97	
5. Sensitivity	3.74	1.06	.22 ***	.13 *	.02	.37 ***	.97

*Note.*  $N = 359$ . Alpha coefficients are italicized and presented on the diagonal. † $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Significance tests are two-tailed.

Table 6

*The Effects of the Instrumental and Image Enhancement Motive Manipulations on Quality Ratings (Study 2)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Word Count Included as a Control Variable</b>							<b>Word Count Not Included as a Control Variable</b>						
<i>Step 1</i>					.36	-	<i>Step 1</i>					.03	-
Intercept	2.57	.08	30.84	<.001			Intercept	3.54	.05	65.79	<.001		
Word Count	.18	.01	13.67	<.001			Instrumental Condition	.14	.05	2.64	.009		
Instrumental Condition	.09	.04	2.04	.042			Image Condition	-.08	.05	-1.53	.128		
Image Condition	-.10	.04	-2.39	.017									
<i>Step 2</i>					.36	.00	<i>Step 2</i>					.03	.00
Intercept	2.56	.08	30.61	<.001			Intercept	3.54	.05	64.96	<.001		
Word Count	.18	.01	13.67	<.001			Instrumental Condition	.14	.05	2.65	.008		
Instrumental Condition	.09	.04	2.06	.040			Image Condition	-.08	.05	-1.48	.139		
Image Condition	-.10	.04	-2.31	.022			Instrumental $\times$ Image	-.02	.05	-.32	.752		
Instrumental $\times$ Image	-.03	.04	-.71	.477									

*Note.*  $N = 359$ . Image = Image Enhancement. Instrumental condition and image enhancement condition were effect coded (high = 1, low = -1). Significance tests are two-tailed.

Table 7

*The Effects of the Instrumental and Image Enhancement Motive Manipulations on Sensitivity Ratings (Study 2)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Word Count Included as a Control Variable</b>							<b>Word Count Not Included as a Control Variable</b>						
<i>Step 1</i>					.06	-	<i>Step 1</i>					.02	-
Intercept	3.37	.10	32.34	<.001			Intercept	3.72	.06	66.89	<.001		
Word Count	.06	.02	4.01	<.001			Instrumental Condition	.14	.06	2.56	.011		
Instrumental Condition	.12	.06	2.24	.025			Image Condition	.04	.06	.78	.434		
Image Condition	.04	.05	.65	.517									
<i>Step 2</i>					.07	.01	<i>Step 2</i>					.03	.01
Intercept	3.39	.10	32.48	<.001			Intercept	3.74	.06	66.71	<.001		
Word Count	.06	.02	3.98	<.001			Instrumental Condition	.14	.06	2.50	.013		
Instrumental Condition	.12	.06	2.20	.029			Image Condition	.03	.06	.58	.559		
Image Condition	.03	.05	.46	.647			Instrumental × Image	.11	.06	1.93	.055		
Instrumental × Image	.10	.05	1.87	.062									

*Note.* *N* = 359. Image = Image Enhancement. Instrumental condition and image enhancement condition were effect coded (high = 1, low = -1). Significance tests are two-tailed.

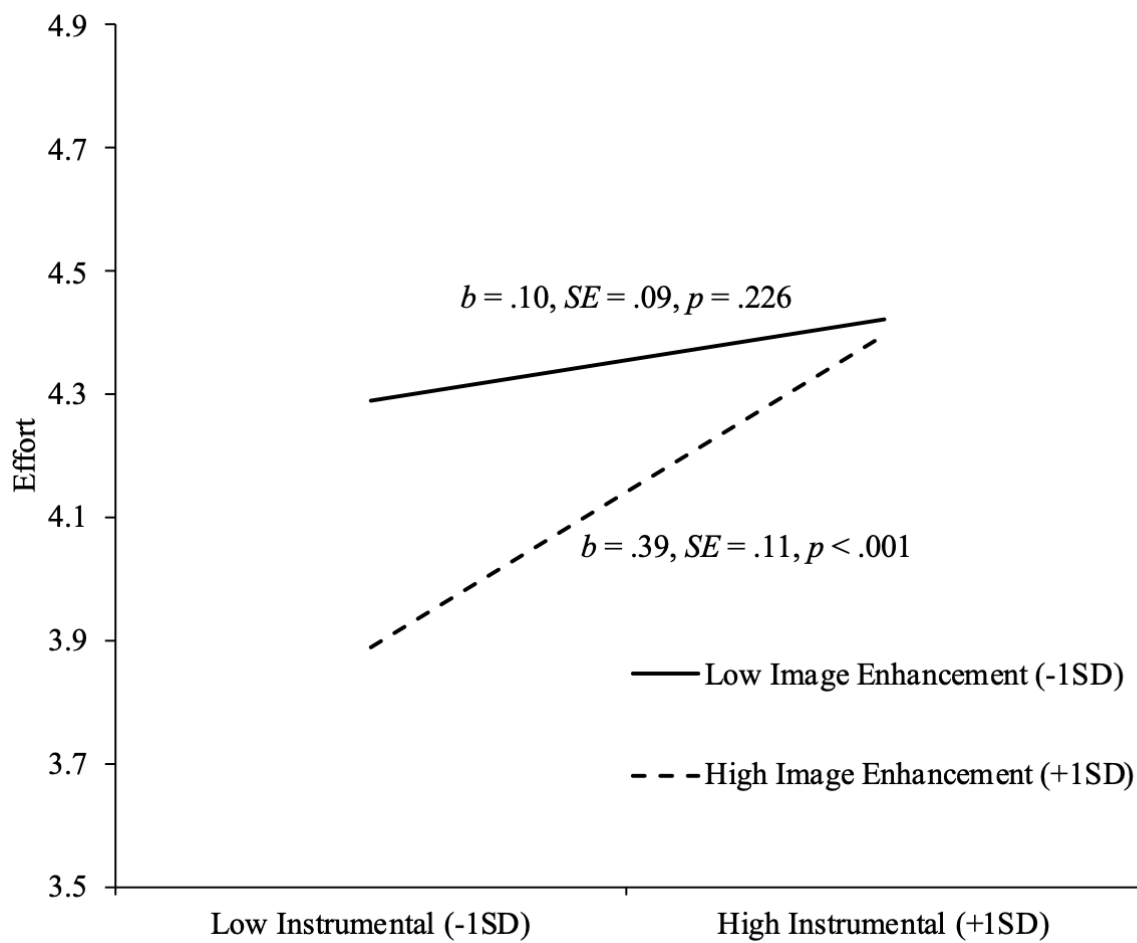


Figure 1. Relationship between perceived instrumental motives, image enhancement motives, and effort (Study 1).



## Appendix A: Perceived Feedback-Seeking Motives Scale

Instructions:

Please think about why this subordinate may have asked you for feedback and indicate your agreement with the following statements:

*They sought feedback because they...*

1. Wanted to learn more about the performance expectations that others set for them. *(Instrumental)*
2. Wanted to improve their job-related skills. *(Instrumental)*
3. Wanted to “learn the ropes” after new performance goals and expectations were set for them. *(Instrumental)*
4. Wanted to understand whether they were meeting expectations. *(Instrumental)*
5. Were searching for hints that could help them improve their performance. *(Instrumental)*
6. Were taking an opportunity to remind you of their accomplishments. *(Image Enhancement)*
7. Knew it would enhance the way you saw them. *(Image Enhancement)*
8. Were aiming to communicate to you that they are competent. *(Image Enhancement)*
9. Were trying to influence how you see them. *(Image Enhancement)*
10. Wanted to feel better about their performance. *(Ego Enhancement)*
11. Were looking for you to reassure them. *(Ego Enhancement)*
12. Were hoping you would make them feel more confident about performing a specific task. *(Ego Enhancement)*

Response scale: 1 (*Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Disagree*), 3 (*Neither Agree nor Disagree*), 4 (*Agree*), 5 (*Strongly Agree*)

## Appendix B: Study 2 Vignettes

*All vignettes were preceded by these instructions:*

Please imagine you are a manager at a small advertising firm. You have 15 employees that directly report to you, one of whom is named Joe. Joe's performance is generally middle of the pack, and you have been supervising him for three years.

One day, you get the following email from Joe:

*A: High Image Enhancement Motives, Low Instrumental Motives*

**From:** Joe Caldwell <joe@advertace.com>  
**Sent:** October 10, 2019 9:06:24 AM  
**Subject:** Feedback

Hey,

Could you give me some feedback on this logo? Don't worry too much about the font, I still need to work on that. But I think the other aspects of it are pretty good and would love to hear your thoughts on them.

Thanks in advance,

**Joe Caldwell**  
Graphic Designer

Phone: 835-922-2567  
Web: [www.advertace.com](http://www.advertace.com)  
Email: [joe@advertace.com](mailto:joe@advertace.com)



You've given Joe feedback before that he hasn't used, so you are skeptical any feedback you give him will translate into significant improvements in the quality of his logo. You also know that Joe is bragging, and hoping you will give him some praise. It seems like he is asking you for feedback in an attempt to enhance the way you think about him and his work, perhaps to put himself in a good position for a pay raise.

*B: High Image Enhancement Motives, High Instrumental Motives*

**From:** Joe Caldwell <joe@advertace.com>  
**Sent:** October 10, 2019 9:06:24 AM  
**Subject:** Feedback

Hey,

Could you give me some feedback on this logo? Don't worry too much about the font, I still need to work on that. But I think the other aspects of it are pretty good and would love to hear your thoughts on them.

Thanks in advance,

**Joe Caldwell**  
Graphic Designer

Phone: 835-922-2567

Web: [www.advertace.com](http://www.advertace.com)

Email: [joe@advertace.com](mailto:joe@advertace.com)



You know that every time you give Joe feedback, he works hard to implement it, so you feel like any feedback you give him will translate into significant improvements in the quality of his logo. You also know that Joe is bragging, and hoping you will give him some praise. It seems like he is asking you for feedback in an attempt to enhance the way you think about him and his work, perhaps to put himself in a good position for a pay raise.

*C: Low Image Enhancement Motives, Low Instrumental Motives*

**From:** Joe Caldwell <joe@advertace.com>  
**Sent:** October 10, 2019 9:06:24 AM  
**Subject:** Feedback

Hey,

Could you give me some feedback on this logo? I think the font still needs some work, so I would love to hear your thoughts on how I could improve it. But I think all the other aspects are pretty good, so you don't have to spend much time on them.

Thanks in advance,

**Joe Caldwell**  
*Graphic Designer*

**Phone:** 835-922-2567  
**Web:** [www.advertace.com](http://www.advertace.com)  
**Email:** [joe@advertace.com](mailto:joe@advertace.com)



You've given Joe feedback before that he hasn't used, so you are skeptical any feedback you give him will translate into significant improvements in the quality of his logo. You also don't think that Joe is bragging or looking for praise. It doesn't seem like he is asking for feedback in order to enhance the way you think about him or his work.

*D: Low Image Enhancement Motives, High Instrumental Motives*

**From:** Joe Caldwell <joe@advertace.com>

**Sent:** October 10, 2019 9:06:24 AM

**Subject:** Feedback

Hey,

Could you give me some feedback on this logo? I think the font still needs some work, so I would love to hear your thoughts on how I could improve it. But I think all the other aspects are pretty good, so you don't have to spend much time on them.

Thanks in advance,

**Joe Caldwell**  
*Graphic Designer*

**Phone:** 835-922-2567

**Web:** [www.advertace.com](http://www.advertace.com)

**Email:** [joe@advertace.com](mailto:joe@advertace.com)



You know that every time you give Joe feedback, he works hard to implement it, so you feel like any feedback you give him will translate into significant improvements in the quality of his logo. You also don't think that Joe is bragging or looking for praise. It doesn't seem like he is asking for feedback in order to enhance the way you think about him or his work.

Appendix C: Study 2 Feedback Stimulus

