

FEEDBACK ORIENTATION, FEEDBACK CULTURE, AND THE LONGITUDINAL
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

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Abstract

This paper conceptualizes feedback as part of a longitudinal performance management process influenced by, and contributing to, the individual's feedback orientation and the organization's feedback culture. Feedback orientation refers to an individual's overall receptivity to feedback, including comfort with feedback, tendency to seek feedback and process it mindfully, and the likelihood of acting on the feedback to guide behavior change and performance improvement. Feedback culture refers to the organization's support for feedback, including non-threatening, behaviorally-focused feedback, coaching to help interpret and use feedback, and a strong link between performance improvement and valued outcomes. Critical events direct attention to the value of feedback and thereby start a performance management cycle of receiving, absorbing, and applying feedback in the following days, weeks, and months. Human resource research and practice need to measure feedback orientation and culture and capture longitudinal feedback processes to better understand and influence the effects of feedback on self-awareness, self-confidence, and job performance.

FEEDBACK ORIENTATION, FEEDBACK CULTURE, AND THE LONGITUDINAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

While considerable attention has been given recently to multi-source "360 degree" feedback (cf. Tornow & London, 1998; London & Smither, 1995) as a discrete event, much less attention has been given to the individual, organizational, and longitudinal aspects of the use of feedback. Approaches to feedback in the literature have moved from a static view focusing on the immediate effects of feedback (see reviews by Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; and Nadler, 1979) to a more dynamic view focusing on feedback seeking (cf. Larson, 1984; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Walker & Smither, 1999), multiple sources of feedback (Tornow & London, 1998), and feedback interventions to improve performance (see Kluger & DeNisi's 1996 meta-analysis). The tendency in the literature has been to view feedback in isolation of other events that unfold over time.

In the current paper, we adopt a person-environment interaction view of feedback processes over time, outlined in Figure 1. We focus on how individual characteristics and organizational characteristics shape the impact of feedback over time. Specifically, we extend the dynamic view of feedback by first introducing the concepts of feedback orientation (an individual-level construct) and feedback culture (an organizational-level construct). We then describe their tie to the longitudinal performance management process. We also describe how a longitudinal perspective can help us understand feedback processes in ways that are not obvious when feedback processes are viewed from a short-term or cross-sectional perspective. We conclude by offering directions for research that will help us better understand the complex effects of interacting and overlapping feedback

cycles.

Insert Figure 1 about here

FEEDBACK ORIENTATION

We conceptualize feedback orientation as a construct consisting of multiple dimensions that work together additively to determine an individual's overall receptivity to feedback and the extent to which the individual welcomes guidance and coaching. It includes: (1) liking feedback (i.e., an overall positive affect toward feedback and an absence, or a low level, of evaluation apprehension), (2) behavioral propensity to seek feedback (Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashford & Tsui, 1991), (3) cognitive propensity to process feedback mindfully and deeply, (4) sensitivity to others' views of oneself (similar to the concept of public self-consciousness, Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995; and to external propensity, Herold, Parsons, & Rensvold, 1996), (5) a belief in the value of feedback--that it offers insights that may help the recipient become more effective and that actions taken in response to feedback can enhance personal effectiveness (Bandura, 1982), and (6) feeling accountable to act on the feedback (London, Smither, & Adsit, 1997).

In order to better understand feedback orientation, consider how it may be related conceptually to personality and individual difference variables. People are generally motivated to learn about themselves, verify their self-image, and enhance their self-confidence (Baumeister, 1998, 1999). Those who are high in feedback orientation should recognize the value of feedback as they strive for self-awareness, self-verification, and

self-enhancement. Also, feedback orientation should be associated with openness to new experiences. Openness to experience is positively associated with curiosity, reflection, introspection, and willingness to consider new approaches (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Feedback orientation should also be positively related to having a mastery orientation (rather than a performance orientation) to learning (Dweck, 1986). For those with a mastery orientation, the learner's attentional focus is on developing competence. These learners want to acquire knowledge and skill until they reach a level of mastery that reflects a deep (expert) understanding, and they view feedback about skill deficits as an opportunity for improvement. In contrast, people with a performance orientation often compare their performance to that of others and tend to focus on doing better than others (e.g., on a test or on the job). They tend to see failure as indicating a lack of ability, and therefore view performance feedback as threatening. Moreover, learners with a mastery orientation are more likely to be receptive to, and make constructive use of, feedback and thus persist until they attain competence (Squires & Adler, 1998).

Feedback orientation is also linked to the concepts of self-monitoring and public self-consciousness. Self-monitors are sensitive to others' reactions of them, seek to understand what others expect of them, and vary their behavior to meet the expectations of the situation (Snyder & Copeland, 1989; Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998). Whether one is sensitive to, and cares about, what others think may stem from the desire to reduce uncertainty, protect one's ego, and manage the impression one makes on others (Levy et al., 1995). The desire to reduce uncertainty affects one's initial receptivity to feedback, while the desire to protect one's self-esteem and manage others' impressions

affects whether and how one seeks additional feedback (Levy et al., 1995). This suggests that different aspects of feedback orientation may be influential as feedback is received, interpreted, and applied. The desire for certainty about where one stands in the eyes of others may affect how feedback is received initially. The need to protect one's ego may influence whether feedback is processed mindfully. Trying to manage others' impressions may influence whether and how one changes one's behavior.

The individual's frame of mind will influence how he or she reacts to feedback over time. People low in self-confidence are more likely to have trouble re-establishing a positive job or career track after negative feedback (McCauley, Lombardo, & Usher, 1989). Those with high resilience and self-confidence will look for ways to overcome failure. People with low self-confidence and resilience are likely to be surprised by positive events and may adjust their self-concepts upward, especially if the positive feedback continues over time. They may expect poor feedback which will reinforce their low self-confidence (Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970; Swann, Pelham & Krull, 1989; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). Those with high self-confidence and resilience may be reinforced by continuing success, but may be lulled into a false sense that they can handle any situation. For example, people with high self-esteem persist longer than others even when persistence is counterproductive, so they sometimes waste time, effort, or other resources (Baumeister, 1998).

Feedback orientation may evolve over time as feedback becomes more meaningful and valuable to the individual. It develops from a more general construct that influences anticipation of, and reactions to, almost any feedback to a more situation-specific construct that makes an individual selective in judging which types and sources of

feedback are important and deserve attention and concern. An individual's feedback orientation is likely to be stable in the medium-term (e.g., 6 to 12 months) but may shift over longer time frames as the individual acquires different experiences with feedback and is shaped by the organization's feedback culture.

Feedback orientation can be a marker for charting the effects of feedback on the individual over time. Changes in feedback orientation are likely to reflect the usefulness of feedback as the individual changes behavior and accomplishes (or fails to accomplish) improvements in performance. Across individuals, data on average feedback orientation can serve as one measure of the overall effect of the feedback processes in the organization.

Proposition 1a. Feedback orientation is positively related to desire for self-awareness, self-verification, self-enhancement, openness to experience, mastery orientation, self-monitoring, and public self-consciousness.

Proposition 1b. Individual levels of feedback orientation are stable over a medium time frame (several months) but shift as the individual's experiences are shaped by the organization's feedback culture.

FEEDBACK CULTURE

A strong feedback culture is one where individuals continuously receive, solicit, and use formal and informal feedback to improve their job performance. This may be linked to effective policies and programs for performance management, continuous learning, and career development. The individual's feedback orientation depends in part on the support and climate for learning. The more frequent the feedback and the closer it

follows the behavior in question, the more likely it is to be accepted (cf. Cederblom, 1982). The more support for learning and development, including the availability of behaviorally-oriented feedback, the more the individual is likely to develop a positive orientation toward feedback.

A feedback culture can be shaped by three categories of organizational practices and interventions, outlined in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

(1) Some practices and interventions enhance the quality of feedback. For example, organizations can provide (a) training for supervisors and others about how to provide useful feedback, (b) clear standards concerning valued behaviors that are relevant to organizational goals, (c) clear performance measurements, (d) reports tying individual performance to bottom-line departmental or organizational (e.g., financial or operational) indexes, and (e) time to review and clarify feedback results with others, such as one's supervisor. The higher the quality of feedback, the less individuals will resist it or react in ways that block its use.

(2) Other organizational practices and interventions help to emphasize the importance of feedback in the organization. For example, top-level managers can be expected to serve as role models about how to seek, receive, and use feedback. The organization can ensure that everyone receives feedback (i.e., it's not voluntary) and uses feedback to guide development. It can encourage and emphasize the importance of informal (or 'in the moment') feedback (as well as formal feedback via traditional appraisals or multi-source feedback). It can also involve employees in the development of

behavior/performance standards. Finally, the organization can ensure that performance improvements following feedback are recognized and rewarded. The more important feedback is in the organization, the more individuals will spend time and energy processing it mindfully.

(3) Finally, some practices and interventions provide support for using feedback. For example, the organization can provide skilled facilitators to help recipients interpret formal (e.g., multi-source) feedback, set goals, and track progress. Supervisors can be trained and rewarded for coaching (see below). Feedback recipients can be encouraged to discuss their feedback with raters and other colleagues to help clarify the feedback and reach a shared agreement concerning behavior expectations and changes. Finally, feedback recipients need freedom to decide how they will act on the feedback (giving them a sense of self-control) and opportunities to learn.

The important role of organizational support for feedback is consistent with and suggested by research showing how organizational support can enhance or detract from continuous learning (London & Smither, 1999). For example, Tracey, Tannenbaum, and Kavanagh (1995) found that supervisory training is more likely to transfer to the job when the work setting supports the specific skills learned and, more generally, creates an environment that supports continuous learning. They argue that continuous learning is enhanced when (a) team members encourage and reinforce each other's learning, (b) the organization expects and rewards innovation, and (c) the organization provides resources (e.g., training) that enable self-development. Maurer and Tarulli (1994) found that supervisor and coworker support coupled with company policies that enable participation in learning activities were related to voluntary participation in learning activities. Noe and

Wilk (1993) found that work environment perceptions (e.g., social support and situational constraints) affected the amount of developmental activities in which employees participated. In each of these instances, continuous learning was shaped by organizational support. In sum, learning organizations (those capable of adapting to changes in the external environment by practicing continuous renewal of their structures and practices) tend to foster continuous learning (Wishart, Elam, & Robey, 1996). They do this by acquiring and using performance information and encouraging ongoing experimentation and innovation. Ideally, learning becomes an essential part of the way the organization does business.

In a similar manner, we argue that feedback needs to become an essential part of the way work is accomplished. Overall, as a positive feedback culture becomes stronger, individuals seek and receive feedback more often, deal with it mindfully, and use it to calibrate and adjust their behavior to improve performance.

Proposition 2. Strong feedback cultures enhance individuals' feedback orientation.

Coaching

The widespread availability of effective coaching is likely to be a hallmark of organizations with a strong feedback culture. The coach may be a supervisor, mentor, an external (e.g., executive) coach, a peer, or even a subordinate. Coaching is not a one-time, one-way relationship. Coaching may focus on improving skills, performance, development opportunities, and solving business problems over time (Kilburg, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1997).

Coaching goes beyond giving feedback about what is right or wrong with an

individual's performance. Coaches provide encouragement, information about expectations that they and others hold for the individual, demonstrations of how to do things well, opportunities to practice new behaviors and receive feedback in a non-threatening environment, and praise for successes along the way to performance improvement (Goodstone & Diamante, 1998). Coaches, as collaborative problem solvers and caregivers, are accessible. They attend to, and inquire after, the individual, communicate respect and show appreciation for the individual, act with empathy (identify with the individual's experience), offer insights about the individual's performance and strengths and weaknesses, show compassion, and provide a consistent, reliable source of support (Hillman, Schwandt, & Bartz, 1990; Kahn, 1993; Stowell, 1988).

Some people are natural coaches. Others acquire the role over time. As their career progresses, they reach a stage in their lives where they want to help others and they feel more comfortable in the role. People can learn to be coaches by learning what questions to ask and how to relate to and interact with the person who is coached. Some companies offer training in how to be a coach and reward managers for developing their people.

Individuals who are high in feedback orientation are likely to be receptive to coaching. They will be able to discern who has something to offer them and will especially value seasoned experts who want to convey their knowledge and skills for someone else's benefit. The reverse is also likely: being the recipient of effective coaching can increase one's feedback orientation. That is, coaching supports the value of feedback and encourages its productive use.

Training and rewarding coaches can be a vital part of generating a feedback culture.

Starting from the top of the organization, external coaches can be hired to assist executives in processing feedback survey results (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999). In the process, the executives can learn to coach their subordinates and possibly even their peers and supervisors. Moreover, they can train subordinates and peers to be coaches. As such, coaching can promulgate throughout the organizational hierarchy in a cascading effect over time, and in this way strengthen the organization's feedback culture.

Proposition 3a. Individuals who are high in feedback orientation are more responsive to coaching.

Proposition 3b. Coaching encourages feedback orientation.

TOWARD A LONGITUDINAL, DEVELOPMENTAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Feedback orientation and culture influence how feedback is received, interpreted, and used over time. Here we articulate the components of this longitudinal performance management process and their relationships to feedback orientation and culture. (See Figure 1.)

A manager may receive formal feedback in a variety of situations. One common context for formal feedback is the traditional performance appraisal review discussion with one's supervisor. More extensive feedback may come from a 360-degree feedback survey process where ratings or narrative feedback are collected from the manager's supervisor, direct reports, other coworkers, and (in some instances) internal or external customers. Self-ratings are typically also collected.

Informal feedback, sometimes referred to as 'in the moment' feedback, can also be

critical. Such feedback is provided independently of formal mechanisms (traditional appraisals, 360 feedback). For example, following a difficult team meeting, a colleague may offer relatively spontaneous feedback to a manager about how to handle an interpersonal conflict, get a derailed project back on track, or how to win back an important customer.

Such instances of formal or informal feedback can appear to be discrete events. However, receiving feedback is not a stand-alone, one-time event but the start of a longitudinal performance management process. The effects of feedback occur over time as the individual receives, absorbs, and uses the information. Also, feedback is part of a series of events, some of which may be planned and formal, others of which may be unplanned and informal.

Ideally, feedback stimulates a positive, development-oriented process that leads, over time, to learning, behavior change, and performance improvement. In a positive performance management cycle, the individual uses the feedback to develop accurate performance and capability judgments, set achievable goals, learn and apply new behaviors, and accomplish valued tasks.

However, people are not always receptive to feedback. Sometimes it takes considerable negative feedback from a number of people over time to have a meaningful effect (Kaplan & Palus, 1994). This may be especially likely when the feedback is related to long-standing personal traits or behaviors that are central to a person's self-image. It is noteworthy that this type of feedback is perhaps the most important to a person, but it is the least likely to be understood by a narrow, cross-sectional view of the feedback process.

We argue that reactions to such negative feedback will be related to the strength and consistency of the feedback, the individual's feedback orientation, and the organization's support for feedback and development. The consistency of feedback over time and across different sources of feedback is important because inconsistent feedback (e.g., negative feedback from some sources but positive feedback from others) will increase the likelihood that external attributions (Kelly, 1967) will be made for the feedback. For example, feedback recipients may discount the feedback as reflecting an idiosyncratic view of the person providing negative feedback.

Key questions are: What processes occur that cause the recipient to learn from the feedback and apply the learning to improve or maintain job performance? How long does this take? How does the individual's feedback orientation and the organization's feedback culture enhance (or in some instances, distract from) the process?

Consider the following possibilities about the effects of feedback over time.

* Positive reactions to feedback and behavior change resulting from feedback may occur slowly and incrementally (in small steps) over time as the focal manager becomes used to (comfortable with) receiving feedback, the feedback focuses on behaviors, and the feedback leads to improvements in behavior or performance. These positive reactions give rise to a continuous learning process unless countervailing forces, such as disconfirming or contradictory feedback, intervene (e.g., Sharp, Cutler, & Penrod, 1988).

* Feedback may occur in various aspects of one's life simultaneously. Some people may not be able to deal with, accept, and respond to different sources of feedback at the same time. For example, attentional resources may be limited or it may be unclear what goals to set in response to apparently conflicting feedback. Other people may segment

their lives so that feedback regarding one area does not affect feedback regarding another (Cohen, 1995; Kirchmeyer, 1995).

* Self-knowledge and self-concept change as the individual gains self-confidence with improving feedback results over time. This is consistent with research showing that changes in self-concept follow from behavioral changes that are observed by others (Tice, 1992).

We contend here that these processes unfold in a developmental, performance management cycle consisting of receiving, absorbing, and using feedback. The cycle is repeated each time feedback is given, however, the value of the cycle for improving performance is likely to vary depending on a number of factors, such as the quality of the feedback, the individual's receptivity to feedback, the support for its use, and the extent to which the individual is dealing with other feedback.

Feedback and performance management cycles are often triggered by critical events. Next we describe the role of critical events in feedback and performance management processes. Then we briefly describe the stages of the performance management cycle. Finally, we discuss some insights about feedback processes that can be obtained by adopting a broad, longitudinal perspective.

Critical Events

Critical events are confidence-testing junctures and may be opportunities for learning. Examples of key events are when feedback (especially negative feedback) is sent, a new job or project is assigned, coaching occurs, a crisis happens that tests the individual's competence, or new organizational strategies or performance expectations are announced. Such key events focus attention on performance gaps and chances for

improvement. However, reactions to these key events are not always positive. Indeed, evidence shows that feedback interventions are often not effective, especially when they direct the recipient's attention away from the task and instead threaten self-confidence (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

Several shared features characterize critical events. First, situations that are novel, unfamiliar, or different to the focal individual are likely to create the setting for critical events. Second, the individual recognizes that his or her behavior in this uncertain situation will have important consequences. Stated simply, performance matters and the individual is therefore concerned with performing effectively. Third, the individual is uncertain about how to perform competently. Previous experiences may not seem relevant or transferable to the situation. This may be accompanied by uncertainty about whether the individual has the ability or skill required to perform effectively. Taken together, these features direct the individual's attention to the value of feedback and learning.

Thus, events are critical (from the standpoint of performance feedback) when they direct attention to performance that has valued outcomes or key consequences and/or they cause people to think about their capabilities to perform a task in the future (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). Such events force them to recognize the need for change, or alternatively to recognize accomplishments and new competencies. This activates the performance management cycle, causing feedback recipients to make judgments about the effectiveness of their behaviors and to set goals for development or performance.

Critical events and associated feedback not only start a performance management cycle, but the nature of the events influence how performance information is perceived and

self-confidence is established, maintained, diminished, or enhanced. On the one hand, failures, although painful, may be constructive learning opportunities if they point toward behavior changes that can turn the situation around or lead to success in a new situation. On the other hand, failures may be demeaning and confidence crushing, causing people to blame others for the outcome and ultimately leading to career derailment. In such cases, people learn little, don't know where to turn, and may even lose their job (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). This is in line with Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) feedback intervention theory which holds that feedback that focuses on task behaviors leads to behavior change while feedback that focuses on the self (e.g., causes individuals to question their self-confidence) is likely to undermine performance.

Similarly, positive critical events may start a positive performance management cycle when they help individuals recognize their competencies and give them the confidence to try behaviors that further their success in the future. However, positive critical events will have little effect, or may even have a destructive effect, if they lull the individual into feeling that new learning is unnecessary and doing what worked in the past will inevitably work in the future.

Proposition 4a. Critical events lead individuals to recognize or seek feedback and to judge their own capabilities and performance.

Proposition 4b. Negative critical events enhance performance when they help pinpoint ineffective task behaviors and suggest new, more effective task behaviors. Negative critical events diminish performance when they focus attention or blame on the individual as a person (rather than the task) and cause the individual to question his or her self-confidence.

Proposition 4c. Positive critical events enhance performance when they help pinpoint specific effective behaviors and competencies and provide directions for new learning. However, positive critical events may backlash when they blind the individual to risks or situational changes in the future.

COMPONENTS OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT CYCLE

The performance management cycle is a multi-stage, longitudinal process that may last days, weeks, or even months. Key to a performance management cycle is the relationship between receiving and using feedback, moderated by the individual's feedback orientation and the organization's feedback culture. The cycle occurs over time as the individual deals with the feedback. How much time it takes depends on the individual's initial receptivity to feedback, the support for using feedback, and how much emotional and cognitive processing (or turmoil) occurs. We emphasize that reactions to feedback cannot be understood by examining a single feedback episode. Performance management cycles are linked together over time as new feedback events occur. The cycles, which may overlap, affect (reinforce or detract from) past outcomes and contribute to future outcomes. The cycles do not necessarily generate a smooth and progressive set of outcomes. Instead, the path may be messy or rocky as the individual has trouble absorbing and using the information over time. Little behavior or psychological change may occur, in which case the outcomes remain fairly flat over time. People may forget, intentionally or otherwise, what feedback occurred before and how it affected them. Alternatively, they may need to contend simultaneously with feedback from different aspects of life over time, and one area may take precedence over another since their ability to focus and their

emotional stamina may be limited. We segment the performance management cycle into three stages: (1) initially anticipating, receiving, and reacting to the feedback; (2) processing the feedback; and (3) using the feedback.

(1) Anticipating, Receiving, and Reacting to Feedback

This first stage occurs just before and immediately after the feedback is given. This is a perceptual process in that the individual needs, first of all, to attend to the feedback. Individuals' beliefs about themselves and their environment, and their feedback orientation, shape their initial reactions to feedback (DeNisi, Cafferty, & Meglino, 1984). Feedback that is consistent with individuals' existing image of themselves, which is usually the case with positive information, will be processed uncritically and accepted readily (Beach, 1990; Mitchell & Beach, 1990). Such feedback may reinforce their existing self-image but does not provide new directions for behavior change. Feedback that is inconsistent with the existing image, which is usually the case with negative information, is processed mindfully (although, as noted below, intense negative emotions may initially interfere with such processing). Individuals are essentially forced to face the information and make sense of it. They may rationalize the information in some way, attributing it to causes beyond their control (e.g., "My supervisor is mean-spirited."). Feedback that is processed mindfully and attributed to internal, specific (i.e., behavioral) causes, rather than to internal, nonspecific (e.g., 'me as a person') causes, will focus the individual's attention on ways to improve performance (Dunegan, 1993, 1995; Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske, Neuberg, Beattie, & Milberg, 1987; Kulik & Ambrose, 1993).

How feedback is perceived at this stage will be influenced by the individual's feedback orientation, the nature of the feedback (its specificity, clarity, and relevance to

the task at hand), and how it is delivered (e.g., in a threatening manner that aims to cause pain, or in a kind manner that aims to suggest specific ways to change behavior).

This first stage in the performance management cycle consists of (a) the anticipation of feedback, (b) the initial emotions and thoughts, and (c) secondary reactions--the cognitions and emotions that occur after the feedback has had time to sink in.

The anticipation of feedback sets the stage for how individuals are likely to react. Feedback orientation is a major determinant of the individual's expectations about feedback. For example, general discomfort, distrust of the process, or fear about the effects of the information can lead to defensiveness, confusion, uncertainty about what to do, or perceptions of bias or unfairness. While there has been little research on this, one can speculate that feedback will be less effective when individuals fear the feedback or expect negative feedback because they 'know' in advance that their supervisor doesn't like them. People who have often received unfavorable feedback in the past are likely to anticipate that new feedback will also be negative and will avoid such feedback unless the previous feedback was specific, constructive, and offered with positive intent (i.e., to help rather than to punish the recipient). Alternatively, the more enthused they are about the feedback (the more they look forward to it and seek it out), the more they will attend to the feedback.

Upon receiving feedback, the first reaction is likely to be emotional rather than cognitive (Zajonc, 1998). For example, some people may be hurt from negative feedback no matter how small the event or how often it is repeated (Bannister, 1986; Stone & Stone, 1984, 1985). Strong feelings that affect one's self-image can initially interfere with

mindful processing and block openness to learning (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Strong feelings can create biased cognitions, such as blaming others or defensiveness (Kanfer, 1990; Pekrun & Frese, 1992). Even with positive feedback, initially strong positive emotions can be dysfunctional because individuals will be focused on the euphoria of self-satisfaction and fail to hear specific information that can be useful for changing behavior and improving performance. Moreover, the stronger the initial emotions (positive or negative), the less likely individuals may be, at least initially, to process the feedback mindfully.

After the initial emotional response to feedback, secondary reactions (both cognitive and affective) become important. When these secondary reactions to the feedback are positive (i.e., the recipient feels that the feedback is specific, actionable, and constructive), this is likely to promote mindful cognitive processing and effective use of the information. Over time, positive reactions and emotions can generate a sense of optimism and a will to do better, and negative reactions and emotions can generate a sense of failure and frustration that may be difficult to overcome. The organization's feedback culture is likely to influence these secondary reactions to feedback. For instance, coaches can help feedback recipients express their feelings about the feedback and focus on the implications of the feedback for behavior change and development.

The following propositions focus on receiving feedback within the context of a longitudinal performance management process:

Proposition 5a. Over time, positive reactions and emotions following feedback lead to a sense of optimism and a will to do better, and negative reactions and emotions lead to a sense of failure and frustration.

Proposition 5b. Positive feedback orientation helps the individual control and channel emotional reactions from feedback to focus on its behavioral implications.

Proposition 5c. Coaching and other forms of support help individuals deal with their emotional responses to feedback, allowing them to concentrate on its behavioral implications.

(2) Processing the Feedback.

This second stage of the performance management cycle occurs after the immediate reactions to the feedback, and may last hours, days, weeks, or longer. Of course, as noted above, when the feedback is consistent with the individual's existing self-image, it will be processed uncritically (i.e., little effort or attentional resources will be devoted to processing the feedback). On the other hand, when the feedback cycle is triggered by a critical event or when the feedback is inconsistent with the individual's existing self-image, more controlled processing will occur.

Such processing at this stage entails (a) interpreting the feedback, (b) understanding its meaning and value, (c) dealing with emotions, and (d) ultimately believing (or discounting) the feedback. The individual studies the feedback, searching for behavioral implications or signs of strengths and weaknesses. The individual may discuss the information with others or ask for clarification or additional feedback.

Self-verification and justification theories apply here. People generally try to affirm their self-concept by interpreting their experiences in such a way that their self-image remains stable or is restored (Baumeister, 1999; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993).

However, this will be more difficult when feedback that is contrary to one's self-image is strong and clear and there is support for interpreting and applying feedback results (i.e., a strong feedback culture), for instance, a one-on-one coaching session with an independent party (a psychologist) or a constructive, open discussion with one's supervisor.

Feedback orientation and culture will help one seek meaning in feedback.

Individuals high in feedback orientation will seek meaning in the feedback to help them strive to do better. Understanding what behaviors affect performance, and perceiving clear linkages between performance and valued outcomes (e.g., recognition, rewards), will increase the individual's desire to find meaning in the feedback. and to attribute the feedback to internal, changeable characteristics (behaviors, skills, knowledge, etc.).

Accountability can cause individuals to process feedback more deeply and mindfully (London, Smither, & Adsit, 1996). Individuals feel accountable when they recognize and care about others' expectations of them and they recognize the positive or negative consequences of their actions. Accountability may stem from internal forces, such as feedback orientation and the accompanying desire to perform well, and external forces, such as feedback culture and accompanying organizational expectations and rewards, continued close scrutiny by others, and public commitment to accomplishing goals (London et al., 1996).

Proposition 6. Individuals will process feedback more deeply, find more personal meaning in the feedback, and make internal attributions that lead to goal setting when they are high in feedback orientation and the organization has a strong feedback culture.

(3) Using the Feedback

The third stage of the performance management cycle is using the feedback to (a) set goals and (b) track progress. This is perhaps the best understood phase of the performance management cycle, due to the large body of research that has emerged on goal setting theory (see Locke and Latham, 1990, for a detailed review). The feedback directs goal setting by indicating behaviors to change, skills and knowledge to acquire, and performance goals to accomplish. Using the feedback requires setting goals, acting on them, and tracking progress through additional feedback. Acting on goals entails actually participating in learning, trying new behaviors, and making an effort to reach specific performance objectives. This kind of learning is not a one-time event but a continuous process throughout one's career (London & Smither, 1999). However, individuals change the purpose and modes of learning as they achieve interim or major goals and set new targets. Tracking the extent of goal accomplishment brings closure to the performance management cycle but may also start a new cycle. People need feedback to assess the extent to which they have accomplished their goals. Individuals assess for themselves how well they are doing, perhaps by observing and evaluating their own behavior or by seeking feedback from others.

Feedback may be especially valuable when it increases the individual's self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1991). For example, feedback can direct the individual's attention to intrinsic aspirations (for instance, pursuing needs for competence, autonomy, or relatedness) rather than merely pursuing extrinsic rewards (financial success or fame) or acting in the service of someone else's directives. Kasser and Ryan (1996) have shown

that pursuit of intrinsic (as contrasted with extrinsic) aspirations is positively linked to good adjustment and well-being. In sum, self-determination theory suggests that the way people use feedback has important implications. At least sometimes, individuals need to use feedback to support the independent, autonomous pursuit of intrinsic aspirations.

Internal and external factors influence the extent to which feedback is used. When there is (a) a feedback culture that offers encouragement from others and ongoing positive responses to behavior changes, and (b) when the individual is sensitive to others' expectations and evaluations (a component of feedback orientation), goal setting and tracking are more likely to lead to increased self-confidence, excitement about the possibilities, and involvement in performing the task. This follows from Kluger & DeNisi's (1996) feedback intervention theory and from models of continuous learning and learning organizations that emphasize continuous experimentation and feedback (McGill, Slocum, & Lei, 1992; Senge, 1990).

Proposition 7. Goal setting leads to behavior change and seeking feedback on the quality of that change, especially when the individual has a positive feedback orientation and the organization has a strong feedback culture.

THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF REPEATING

AND INTERACTING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT CYCLES

People may experience several, possibly overlapping, cycles as they work on different elements of their performance. Here, research is sparse, and we are on more speculative grounds in proposing how this process works. We may presume that each successive cycle focuses on fine-tuning specific behaviors. Together, the cycles have a

cumulative effect on behavior change. These cycles may be part of a larger cycle, one that is of greater importance to the individual with valuable outcomes at stake.

The cycles repeat over time, but vary in their importance and usefulness to feedback recipients. The quality of the performance management cycle varies between individuals and varies over time for a given individual. Ideally, each iteration becomes incrementally deeper, more complex, more engaging, and more successful in generating positive outcomes. However, a negative cycle may emerge when feedback is ignored or denied (or where the feedback is not task-focused). This may start a downturn in motivation and performance.

The performance management cycles repeat as new feedback is obtained and feedback orientation and culture evolve. Sometimes cycles overlap, or emerging feedback may interrupt an existing cycle and start a new one. Each cycle varies in duration and strength -- duration in terms of how long the recipient takes to come to terms with the feedback, see its value, and make use of the information; and strength in terms of importance of the feedback to the individual and the extent to which the feedback results in behavior change and more positive performance outcomes.

Studying a single performance management cycle in isolation may not fully explain an individual's reactions to feedback. The extent to which a person attends to any particular feedback episode and acts on it will be a function of how much attention and demands the individual has elsewhere. For instance, a manager may receive feedback at work that there is a problem with team management. The manager may begin working on the problem. But then feedback from other sources, possibly about other aspects of the manager's life, may intervene. The manager stops concentrating on improved team

management and focuses on the other problems. Alternatively, a manager may have a significant problem with a customer or with a child (or both at the same time). In the middle of this, the individual receives 360-degree feedback at work that says that the manager doesn't help direct reports with career planning. The manager is likely not to attend to this because the manager is busy attending to other feedback that occurred earlier. While some people segment different aspects of their lives and even different aspects of their jobs, this will be particularly difficult if their roles conflict or the feedback conflicts, suggesting that they should behave in opposite ways (albeit in different situations). Of course, some people do this, for instance, people who seem to have different personalities on the job and at home.

Processing feedback over time, generally during many performance management cycles, can increase the individual's feedback orientation. As more and more individuals in the organization have positive experiences with feedback (using the feedback to pursue and attain behavior change and valued goals), the organization's feedback culture will become stronger. This, in turn, can further enhance the feedback orientation of individuals in the organization.

Over time, feedback is integrated and reconciled with other information people have about themselves. While some feedback may be discounted or discarded, eventually other information is processed mindfully and shapes one's self-concept unless the person is highly guarded and defensive in protecting his or her self-perception (London, 1994, 1995; Jussim, 1991). People who learn from tough experiences do not reflect just on external factors but turn inward and take a close look at themselves (McCauley, Lombardo, & Usher, 1989). This increases their receptivity to feedback in the future.

Proposition 8a. Feedback is attended to less when the individual faces other, especially conflicting, feedback and demands inside or outside work.

Proposition 8b. Over time, feedback orientation and feedback culture are mutually reinforcing, each strengthening (or in some cases diminishing) the other.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH DESIGN, MEASUREMENT, AND PRACTICE

Research should investigate the relationship of feedback orientation to work performance, behavior change, and performance improvements. Research should also investigate the relationship between feedback orientation and related constructs, such as self-monitoring, mastery orientation, self-enhancement, self-verification, and self-management (Latham & Frayne, 1989). Other associated constructs include performance management orientation (the extent to which individuals focus on enhancing current performance and preparing to do well on the job relative to changing job requirements) and development orientation (the tendency to focus on professional growth and career development) (Holt, Noe, & Cavanaugh, 1996).

The process, time-oriented approach to feedback offered in this paper provides a long-term focus that identifies key stages of reaction and points of interface with other people and the task. Each stage in a performance management cycle presents different behaviors and cognitions that are relevant and should be measured. The concepts of cumulative effects of feedback from one cycle to another, evolving reactions to negative feedback addressing long-standing personal qualities, overlapping feedback cycles from different aspects of the recipient's life, and the difficulty people may have dealing with

multiple performance management cycles at once suggest research designs that may not otherwise be considered.

For example, when measuring responses to feedback (especially to negative feedback), we need to understand the extent to which the feedback is perceived as 'new' (i.e., the recipient has not received similar feedback in the past or in other contexts). We also need research that examines feedback from multiple domains of life. One approach is suggested by the work of Kaplan and Palus (1994) where 360-degree survey feedback (ratings from subordinates, peers, supervisors, and/or customers) is coupled with detailed verbatim descriptions of performance, observations from family members and friends, psychometric measures of personality and motivation, and data on early history.

Qualitative studies can allow researchers to trace the performance management cycle for a number of individuals. For example, collecting a record (or log) of the feedback an individual receives (both formal and informal, at work and at home, etc.) over an extended time will allow researchers to examine (a) the amount of feedback being received from different sources or in different domains (because a constructive response to any single piece of feedback will become less likely as the volume of feedback increases), (b) the consistency between feedback from different sources and life domains (over time, consistent feedback should make external attributions less plausible -- Kelly, 1967 -- and should therefore increase the likelihood of constructive responses), (c) patterns in the feedback (negative feedback that implicates long-standing personal dispositions will be responded to more slowly than other feedback), and (d) the extent to which new feedback (about new or different aspects of behavior) interferes with responses to previous feedback (resulting in brief spurts of improvement that are interrupted when new feedback

is received, perhaps from a different source or domain).

Researchers should study the elements of performance management cycles, including how feedback is received, processed, and applied over time. Research should capture the types of feedback received (ratings from others, 'in the moment' or 'just in time' feedback, objective data), quality of the feedback (e.g., specificity, tie to organizational objectives and individual goals), the favorableness of the feedback, and the manner in which it is given (e.g., the extent to which it is constructive and non-threatening and offered with the clear intent of helping the recipient rather than punishing or hurting the recipient). The individual's feedback orientation and the organization's feedback culture should be measured at different points within and across performance management cycles. Also, multiple outcomes should be assessed, including changes in behavior and performance, as well as data on learning (participation in training and new assignments and acquisition of new knowledge and skills).

Within-subject longitudinal research on 360-degree feedback (e.g., Walker & Smither, 1999) should be extended by focusing on whether within-subject improvement over multiple performance management cycles is related to other within-subject events such as supervisory appraisals, informal feedback, coaching, or changes in other domains of life. There is practical value in tracing performance management cycles and studying their evolution over time as feedback ideally becomes more useful and as individuals' feedback orientation and the organization's feedback culture change. Doing so emphasizes that a feedback survey alone does not change behavior. It can help the organization develop and evaluate a comprehensive and on-going program of feedback collection, delivery, interpretation, and use for performance improvement and career development. It

can also help identify boundary conditions where organizational feedback is likely to have little or no impact. It can assess the development of the organization's culture around feedback and suggest points of intervention to enhance the effects of feedback over time.

From the vantage point of practice, human resource programs may be designed to (a) develop feedback orientation by explaining and demonstrating its value, how it can be sought, and establishing accountability mechanisms that assess feedback use and resulting behavior change; (b) build the organization's feedback culture by affecting the quality of the feedback, the importance given to feedback in the organization, and support for the three stages of the feedback cycle; and (c) ensure that feedback is not a one-time or isolated event but part of a comprehensive performance management process that occurs over a period of years (consistent with Walker & Smither's, 1999, demonstration that what employees do with feedback results matters in affecting their performance over long periods of time).

CONCLUSION

Feedback orientation and culture influence receptivity to feedback and the extent to which feedback is sought, valued, and used. Feedback involves repeating, multi-stage cycles. Receiving, interpreting, and applying feedback occur in each cycle and affect succeeding cycles. Individuals' reactions and behaviors vary at each stage of the cycle. Each stage needs to be understood in a longitudinal context to determine ways to enhance the value of feedback. Over time, multiple performance management cycles may enhance the individual's feedback orientation and create a feedback culture that enhances performance improvement and career development.

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Table 1

Organizational Practices and Interventions that Create a Feedback Culture

1. Enhancing the quality of feedback.

- Training for supervisors and others about how to provide useful feedback
- Creating clear standards concerning valued behaviors that are relevant to organizational goals
- Providing clear performance measurements
- Providing reports tying individual performance to bottom-line departmental or organizational (e.g., financial or operational) indexes
- Providing time to review and clarify feedback results with others, such as one's supervisor

2. Emphasizing the importance of feedback in the organization.

- Expecting top-level managers to serve as role models about how to seek, receive, and use feedback
- Ensuring that everyone receives feedback (i.e., it's not voluntary) and uses feedback to guide development
- Encouraging the importance of informal (or 'in the moment') feedback
- Involving employees in the development of behavior/performance standards
- Ensuring that performance improvements following feedback are recognized and rewarded

3. Providing support for using feedback.

1. Providing skilled facilitators to help recipients interpret formal (e.g., multi-source) feedback, set goals, and track progress.
2. Training and rewarding supervisors for coaching.
3. Encouraging feedback recipients to discuss their feedback with raters and other colleagues to help clarify the feedback and reach a shared agreement

concerning behavior expectations and changes.

4. Providing feedback recipients with freedom concerning how they will act on the feedback (giving them a sense of self-control)
5. Providing opportunities to learn

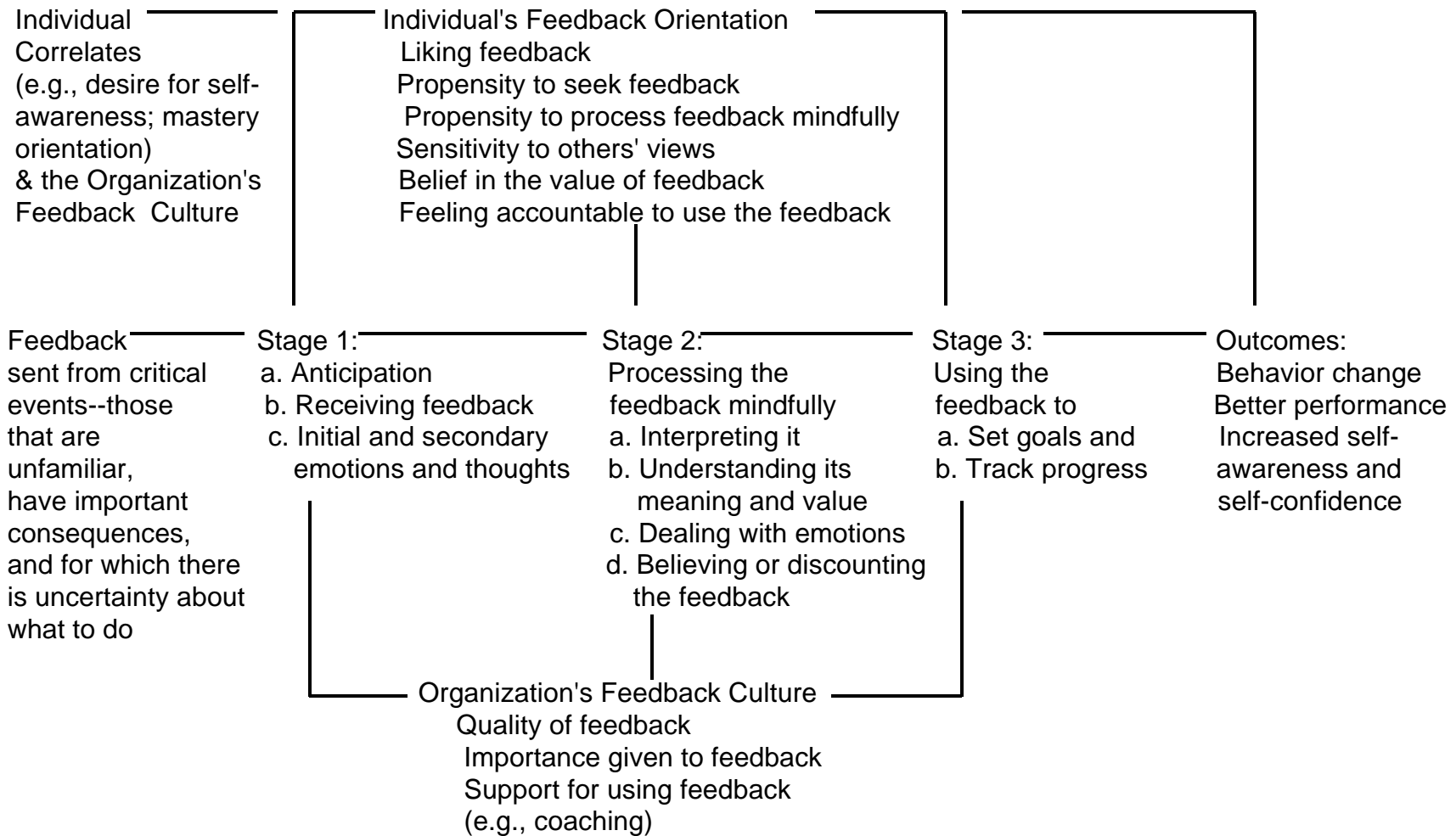


Figure 1: The Role of Feedback, Feedback Orientation, Feedback Culture, and Critical Events in the Longitudinal Performance Management Process

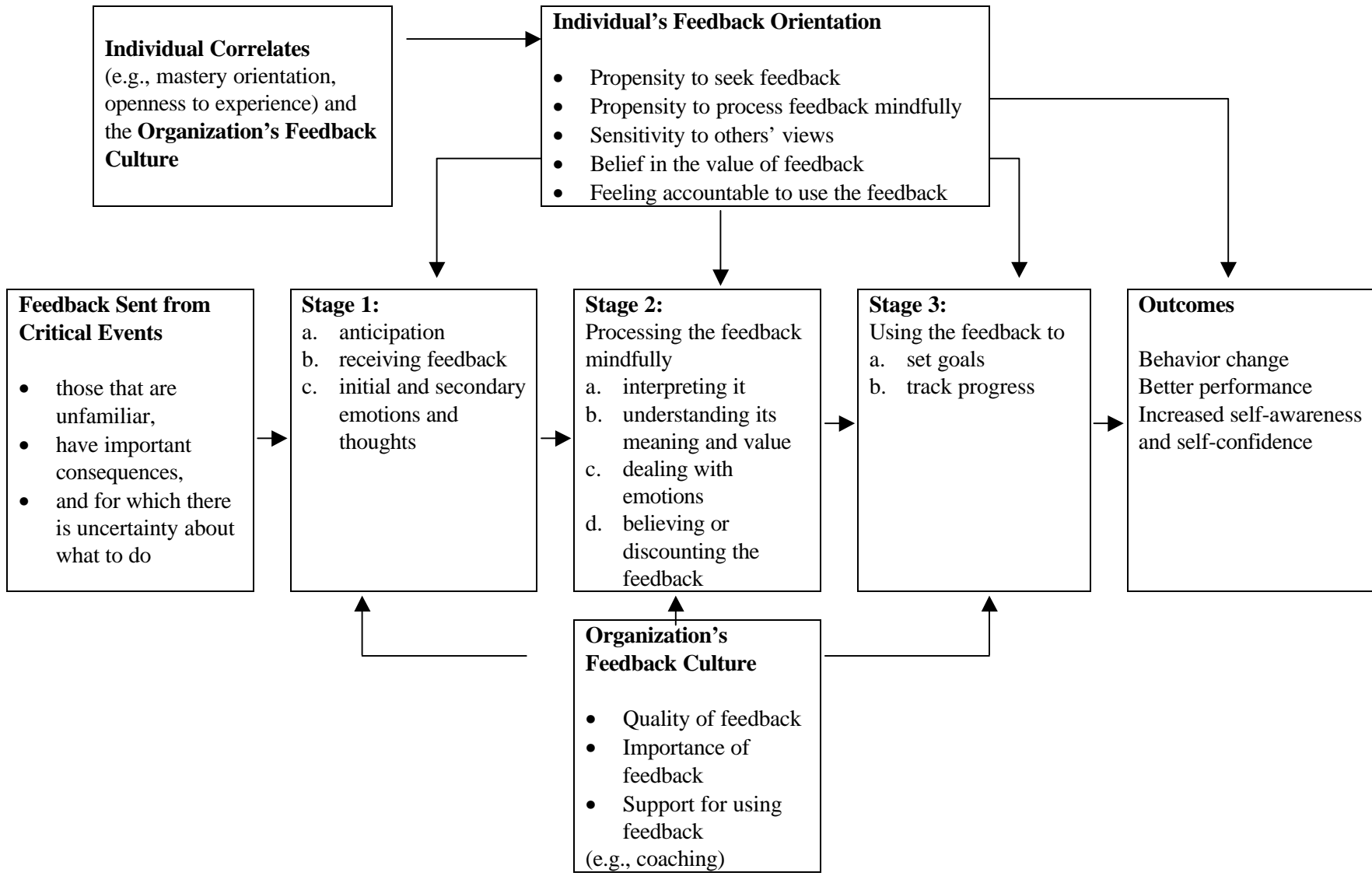


Figure 1: The Role of Feedback Orientation, Feedback Culture, and Critical Events in the Longitudinal Performance Management Process

