

# A Summary of the Research on Feedback-seeking Behavior

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**Abstract.** Feedback seeking behavior of employees plays an important role in the development and progress of an organization. Among the influencing factors of feedback seeking behavior, leadership style has attracted the attention of researchers. In this study, the connotation, motivation and related research of feedback seeking behavior are sorted out. It can be found that the characteristics of feedback seekers, the characteristics of feedback sources and organizational environment factors may affect feedback seeking behavior. In a working environment full of positive interpersonal relationships, employees will be more willing to seek feedback actively.

**Keywords:** Feedback-seeking Behaviour; Leadership style; Feedback source; Working environment.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The dynamic and uncertain organizational environment has increased the importance of employees' positive behavior in the workplace. [1] In particular, more frequent teamwork puts more demands on employees to participate in extra-roles. Feedback-seeking behavior is an out-of-role behavior in which employees consciously put their energy in testing the appropriateness of their behavior, which is of great significance to improving their work performance. [2] Studies show that seeking feedback can bring some positive results for employees and organizations. For example, employees seeking feedback will positively affects their job performance and job satisfaction, and CEO seeking feedback will improve the efficiency of the top management team and company. [3] Although the behavior of seeking feedback can bring these benefits, Parker and Collins (2010) pointed out that the behavior of seeking feedback is the least reported behavior among a series of proactive work behaviors. [4] Feedback seeking behavior is often limited by the cost of effort, face and reasoning. [5] For example, asking for feedback may be considered incompetent and receiving negative information may damage your image. [2] These concerns will make employees adhere to the principle of “doing more and making more mistakes, doing less and making fewer mistakes, not doing well” and “knowing that it is wrong, it is better to say less; To preserve our sanity, but to seek nothing.” choose to suppress the motivation to seek feedback and reduce the frequency of seeking feedback. Considering the advantages and limitations of seeking feedback, researchers and managers try to find ways to encourage employees to actively seek feedback.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

Feedback seeking behavior is a complex behavior, which includes different potential incentive mechanisms. Therefore, exploring the inducing mechanism of feedback seeking behavior is helpful to form a clear theory on how to activate this process, and then stimulate and promote it to play an active role in the workplace from the source. This paper focuses on sorting out the relevant literature of feedback seeking behavior in order to have a systematic understanding of the connotation, motivation and measurement of feedback seeking behavior.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Feedback-seeking Behaviour**

Feedback-seeking behavior was first put forward by Ashford and Cummings. From the perspective of resource theory, feedback seeking behavior is a kind of resource seeking behavior in which individuals actively seek feedback because they perceive a lack of resources. [6] Ashford further pointed out that feedback-seeking behavior is a behavioral process in which individuals actively seek and monitor feedback information in order to adapt to the organizational environment and achieve personal goals. [2] The key is the initiative and enthusiasm of individuals seeking feedback. The definition of "feedback" is the process that one party replies to the sender after receiving the information. This reply information is feedback information, which is a series of information available to individuals in the working environment. Later, Ashford, Blatt and VandeWalle called feedback seeking behavior a strategy adopted by individuals to adapt to the environment and pursue achievements. This strategy can enable individuals to obtain valuable information from the organization, and clarify how to change their behavior to promote their continuous progress. [7]. Parker and Collins pointed out that feedback seeking behavior is an adaptive environmental strategy, which encourages individuals to actively collect information about themselves from peripheral evaluation, which helps to improve task performance. [4] It should be noted that the concept of feedback seeking motivation is similar to that of feedback seeking behavior, but the difference between them is that feedback seeking motivation is only an individual's intention to seek feedback, and it does not take practical action like feedback seeking behavior.

### **2.2. feedback seeking behavior motivation**

In order to fully understand the connotation of feedback seeking, we need to distinguish its motivation. Based on the process framework of feedback seeking, Ashford, Blatt and VandeWalle systematically combed and summarized the relevant literature from three aspects: motivation (antecedent), action decision and result. [7]. Among them, the motivation in the process of seeking feedback can be roughly divided into three categories: instrumental motivation, self-defense motivation and impression management motivation.

Instrumental motivation refers to that individuals regard feedback seeking behavior as an effective tool to help them acquire information resources and achieve their goals, which is completely consistent with the definition of feedback seeking. The instrumental value of seeking feedback lies in that it can help individuals obtain more accurate information and reduce uncertainty. Facing the ever-changing organizational environment, employees can get useful feedback and adjust their work content in time, which not only reduces the uncertainty in the working environment, but also helps new employees adapt to the changing environment more quickly. Unlike instrumental motivation, which can promote feedback seeking behavior, self-defense motivation and impression management motivation will limit individual feedback seeking. Recipients generally pay attention to the information related to themselves in feedback, but avoid talking about the information that threatens self-concept, and tend to protect themselves and defend themselves.

### **2.3. Research on feedback seeking behavior**

Over the years, a large number of researches have explored the antecedent variables and outcome variables of employees' feedback seeking behavior in organizations, and accumulated rich achievements.

The research on the antecedents of feedback seeking in academic circles can also be sorted out from two aspects: personal characteristics and situational factors. As far as personal characteristics are concerned, individuals with performance proof orientation seek feedback more frequently, while those with performance avoidance orientation seek feedback less frequently. Parker and Collins found that there is a positive correlation between due diligence and management feedback monitoring. [4]; Lin et al. have proved that the self-definition of future work can stimulate feedback seeking behavior;

Chen et al. discussed the "double-sided" influence of entrepreneurial anxiety on innovation performance. Entrepreneurial anxiety will encourage entrepreneurs to influence the realization of innovation performance through feedback seeking behavior, and moderate entrepreneurial anxiety will help entrepreneurs achieve a higher level of innovation performance. Too high or too low entrepreneurial anxiety is not conducive to the realization of innovative performance. In addition, the individual's sense of control, initiative, self-esteem and self-efficacy are also factors affecting feedback seeking behavior. Ashford and Blake found that individuals with higher environmental control are more likely to have higher feedback seeking behaviors. [8] Sherf and Morrison's research pointed out that although the relationship between self-efficacy and feedback seeking is usually positive, from the perspective of low acquisition, high self-efficacy will reduce feedback seeking behavior by making people underestimate the value of feedback. [9]

Situational factors affecting feedback seeking behavior mainly include leadership style, feedback seeking environment and organizational characteristics. As the main source of employee feedback, leaders have an important influence on employees' feedback seeking behavior. Different leadership styles have different effects on employees' motivation and behavior of seeking feedback. For example, transformational leadership can inspire employees to seek feedback. Ni Qing and Du Pengcheng's research shows that humble leaders actively influence feedback seeking behavior through the chain intermediary function of internal status cognition and risk taking. However, improper supervision behaviors such as abusive management of leaders have a restraining effect on employees' feedback seeking behavior [10].

In terms of feedback seeking environment and organizational characteristics, leader-member exchange, superior-subordinate relationship, organizational creativity support, learning culture perception and task interdependence [11] are all common factors that encourage individuals to actively seek feedback. In addition, many scholars have found that there is a strong positive correlation between feedback environment (the reaction of supervisors and colleagues to feedback) and employees' tendency to seek feedback. For example, guiding constructive feedback can positively predict employees' feedback-seeking behavior; Leaders' high-performance expectation have a positive incentive effect on employees' feedback seeking behavior. Van der Rijt and others have studied the relationship between job characteristics and feedback seeking, and the research shows that the relationship between job pressure and feedback seeking is inverted U-shaped. [12] Jin Yaoguang and others conducted a study on the influence of employee 'feedback seeking on their adaptation performance under high challenge and high pressure. It shows that under high challenge and pressure, feedback seeking behavior is more helpful to enhance their own relationship energy, so as to realize the sharing of honor and disgrace and help improve their adaptive performance. Ashford proposed and confirmed that the uncertainty of perception is positively related to the perceived value of feedback, which leads to more frequent feedback seeking.<sup>[2]</sup> However, the research by Anseel and Lievens reports a U-shaped curve relationship between uncertainty and feedback demand, rather than a straight-line relationship.

### **3. Summary**

As an adaptive behavior, feedback seeking behavior can enable employees to obtain valuable information, modify behavior, increase the possibility of achieving goals, and have a positive impact on employee performance and socialization of new employees. Considering the advantages and limitations of seeking feedback, researchers and managers try to find ways to encourage employees to actively seek feedback. Previous studies have shown that the characteristics of feedback seekers, feedback sources and organizational environment factors may affect feedback seeking behavior. Since leadership is an important source of employee feedback, most studies focus on how the characteristics of leadership affect employees' behavior of seeking feedback. [13] Previous research has confirmed some traditional top-down leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, [14] service-oriented leadership [15] and authorized leadership have a positive impact on employees'

feedback seeking behavior. We can find that employees are willing to participate in more feedback seeking in the workplace full of positive interpersonal interaction.

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