MEASURING SUBORDINATE PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK INTENTIONS: SOME UNSETTLING RESULTS

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To demonstrate the importance of subordinate perceptions of supervisor intentions in the feedback process, individuals were asked to report the perceived efficacy of supervisor intentions under a variety of criteria related to the impact of supervisor feedback. In Study 1, 49 participants were asked to generate an exhaustive list of all possible supervisor feedback intentions. In Study 2, 220 participants were asked to evaluate the perceived frequency of the supervisor intentions generated in Study 1, and the extent to which the supervisor intentions were related to four outcome criteria (self-evaluation, building relationships, self-serving for the supervisor, and facilitating subordinate productivity). It was found that subordinates do make fine distinctions concerning their perceptions of supervisor intentions for providing feedback. The research and practical implications of these results are discussed.

RECENT feedback research has posited that individuals are not merely passive receptors of feedback information, but rather play an active role in its acquisition (Ashford and Cummings, 1983) and interpretation (Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor, 1979). As is often the case, supervisor feedback may be incomplete or ambiguous. This kind of

feedback may result in a situation where sense must be made of incomplete feedback information. This situation is due, in part, to the fact that informal feedback can (and often does) occur infrequently and spontaneously within a variety of settings (e.g., feedback which is received in a brief encounter or as part of a more extensive interaction). These potentially salient feedback events must then be interpreted by the subordinate. The meaning of the feedback is derived by using a sense-making process that includes the entire event within which the feedback is embedded (Weick, 1979).

According to the Ilgen et al. (1979) model, the recipient's cognitive and behavioral responses to feedback are the result of the message characteristics (i.e., sign, specificity, and timing), individual differences, and source credibility. Ilgen et al. (179, p. 356) have identified expertise, reliability, dynamism (i.e., energy and boldness), personal attraction, and intention toward the listener as components of source credibility. Of these six components, the determination of supervisor intentions may pose the most uncertainty from one feedback event to the next. This uncertainty is due to the ever changing content of informal feedback. In other words, although supervisor expertise, reliability, and personal attraction are assessed from past experience and although dynamism can be judged from immediately available cues (e.g., level of voice), subordinate perceptions of supervisor intent may reflect daily swings in work pressure, supervisor mood, and current organizational rumors. It also has been noted that intention perceptions are a critical component of interactions (Thomas and Pondy, 1975). When there is some uncertainty about why feedback is being given, such uncertainty would require active processing by the recipient (Feldman, 1981).

When an object or event is of high importance, one will be predisposed to make relatively fine distinctions among its salient characteristics (Weick, 1979). For example, whereas Eskimos have numerous words for the varied textures of snow, most people are content with the simple designations of wet or dry snow. The reason is that for an Eskimo the classification of snow can affect survival whereas for most people snow quality is of lesser importance. It follows that if subordinates perceive that it is important correctly to interpret supervisor feedback, they too should develop finer distinctions among supervisor intentions.

Although the Ilgen et al. (1979) model has generated considerable research, especially with respect to message characteristics, speculations concerning how individuals assess supervisor feedback

intentions have been limited to the communication literature. Citing the work of Hoveland, Harvey, and Sherif (1957), Giffin (1967) stated:

> perceived intentions may be influenced by (a) attempts to persuade others, leading to the inference that the speaker has something to gain (for example, advertising and sales pitches compared to news-casts), and (b) attempts to manipulate the listener, that is, attempts obviously designed to persuade him rather than simply inform him (p. 109)

When viewed as a persuasive message, performance feedback will be subject to the aforementioned perceptions of personal gain and manipulation. A recipient who determines that a message is being given for the other's gain would tend to discount the value of that message (Feldman, 1981). However, such conclusions may be incomplete, as they are derived from research performed in situa-tions that are qualitatively different from those in which supervisors and subordinates typically interact. The influence attempts which are outlined by Giffin (1967) typically are not a part of an ongoing relationship for the participants; nor do participant responses have any long-term effects. Instead, the categories of personal gain and manipulation have been derived from short-term influence attempts, such as individuals observing a commercial or a political address. As a result, these two factors may not capture the fine distinctions of perceived intentions within ongoing supervisor-subordinate rela-tionships.

Purpose

The major purpose of the two studies to be reported was to investigate and to refine subordinate perceptions of the intentions underlying supervisor feedback. The first study was conducted in order to generate an exhaustive list of possible intentions that subordinates perceive concerning why their supervisors provide performance feedback. The second study analyzes these subordi-nate perceived intentions to determine whether they fit into an organized and more parsimonious structure comprising identifiable dimensions.

Together these studies explore the dimensionality of subordinate perceived intentions within the context of supervisor feedback. Two specific objectives of the investigation were (a) to identify for practitioners the type of intentions that may be used by subordinates to interpret the feedback they receive and (b) to foster future research on this important aspect of interactions concerning perfor-

mance feedback (such as the antecedents of intention perceptions and their impact on feedback responses).

Study 1: Generation of List of Perceived Supervisor Feedback Intentions

Method

The range of supervisor feedback intentions as they are perceived by subordinates was determined in the following manner. In a free response format participants were asked to "think back to the times when you have received performance feedback from current or past supervisors." Participants were asked to recall all of the "constructive" and "not so constructive" reasons they perceived concerning why supervisors had given them feedback about their performance. The instructions were purposefully ambiguous as to the type of feedback so that participants could include intentions related to both formal and informal feedback. The two cues related to constructiveness were provided simply to help participants understand what information they were being asked to provide without overly influencing the content of their responses.

Participants

A total of 49 participants provided lists of intentions. The group of participants was composed of approximately 60% undergraduate business majors, 30% graduate business majors, and 10% business faculty members at a large northwestern university. The undergraduate and graduate students filled out the questionnaire in either a human resources management or organizational behavior course being taught by the first or second author. All students with full- or part-time work experience were asked to fill out the questionnaire. Faculty members with previous organizational experience were also included in the sample to ensure that an exhaustive list was generated. Eight faculty members were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Five completed questionnaires were returned.

This broad based sampling of part- and full-time employees was used because of the unique objective of this first study. The participants were not being asked to make judgments that would be statistically weighted. Instead, any unique items offered, regardless of frequency, were to be included in the resulting list of perceived intentions.

Purpose Responses

The first and second authors worked independently to develop an exhaustive list of feedback purposes from the questionnaire responses. After they had completed this task individually, the two lists were compared to develop the final list of intentions. As previously noted, the objective of this step was to eliminate redundancy in the stated intentions reported, not to collapse them into a category scheme as would be the objective in a more standard content analysis (Weber, 1985). The main discrepancies between the two lists were attributable mainly to wording. Most often, the versions were combined or reworded better in order to capture the intention being extracted. There were, however, four instances of disagreement between these two coders. After discussing the items, the investigators dropped two items because of their similarity, and the other two were reworded and added to the final list. This effort resulted in 36 intentions.

In order to check the parsimony of the list of intentions, two independent raters were instructed to go through the raw responses of the 49 participants in Study 1 and to categorize the responses according to the list of 36 intentions which had been developed by the first two authors. This task resulted in two separate frequency counts for the 36 intentions. The two independent raters were in essential agreement on both the number of items which fell into each intention ($r = .93$) and the specific items that were assigned to each intention (Kendall's $W = .91$).

Results and Discussion

Thirty-six specific intentions were generated from Study 1. The agreement among the developers and the two independent raters used in Study 1 was high. Because of this outcome the investigators concluded that they had tapped a group of intentions that were: a) understandable, b) generalizable, and c) parsimonious. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis.

Of the total number of intentions, 21 were categorized by the participants as constructive in nature. These included intentions to inform, instruct, or in some way to assist the subordinate. The remaining 15 intentions were interpreted as not so constructive. These intentions dealt with such perceptions as the supervisor providing performance feedback to assert his/her power or to try to look good at the subordinate's expense. These results confirmed that perceptions of supervisor intentions can best be called "multi-dimensional." From these data it appears that subordinates are able

TABLE 1
Reasons for Receiving Feedback

1) To encourage me to take the initiative and be creative
2) Because there is nothing else better to do
3) To encourage our work group to work as a team
4) To provide me with information on progess toward unit goals
5) To promote safe work habits within my work group
6) To vent dissatisfaction with his/her job
7) To insure that my performance meets departmental standards
8) To belittle me
9) To bolster his/her own self-image at my expense
10) To cover his/her own shortcomings
11) To provide the standard I should use when evaluating my own performance
12) Because his/her superiors were around
13) To help me perform the job more efficiently and with less effort
14) To put me in my place
15) To insure that I remain with the organization
16) To point out my mistakes
17) To influence my opinion of his/her performance
18) To insure that I do not store up any feelings of dissatisfaction
19) To make me feel more relaxed about my job performance
20) To bolster my self-image
21) Because he/she is required to give feedback
22) To communicate managements's expectations to me
23) To train me for future promotions
24) Because he/she needed to reprimand someone
25) To discourage me from daydreaming or experiencing lapses in attention
26) To demonstrate his/her power or authority
27) To provide me with feedback simply to have a reason to socialize
28) To tell me the job was done correctly
29) To change my attitude toward my work
30) Due to his/her moodiness caused by personal problems
31) To get me to work harder
32) As a signal for me to look for another job
33) To point out my strengths and/or weaknesses
34) To increase my productivity
35) To gain respect for him-/herself
36) To pass on information about my performance from other sources (i.e., clients or customers)

to make fine distinctions in supervisor intentions when receiving performance feedback.

Study 2: Intention Taxonomies

Study 2 was concerned with whether underlying dimensions exist within the perceived intentions generated in Study 1. A problem arises when testing for an underlying structure of the subordinates' perceptions of supervisor feedback intent. The structure of intention judgments may be criterion specific. In previous research on the underlying dimensions of the feedback construct, participants rated

the frequency with which specific feedback incidents occurred. Based upon these ratings a structure of feedback was derived (Greller and Herold, 1975; Herold and Greller, 1977; Herold and Parsons, 1985). Unfortunately, the frquency of such phenomena does not provide a reliable indicator of their effects on organizationally relevant outcomes. As such, frequency is a relatively sterile criterion that simply provides a measure of occurrence that is unrelated to importance, interpretation, or impact. Although this criterion (frequency) has become the *de facto* standard in feedback research, it is problematic, and its use in the literature has yet to be fully justified.

An obvious, but potentially problematic, approach is to investigate the impact of intention perceptions on source credibility as suggested by the Ilgen et al. (1979) feedback model. Although they placed intention perceptions under source credibility, the usual connotation for source credibility, as well as the previous testing which has been conducted concerning its impact in relation to feedback, tends to focus on the more stable dimensions of expertise and reliability (Halperin, Snyder, Shenkel, and Houston, 1976; McGinnies and Ward, 1980). Therefore, intention perceptions may be qualitatively different from the more stable judgments that credibility denotes. As this research was designed to identify dimensions of this important component for future research and not to validate its role within the Ilgen et al. (1979) model, a more conservative approach was adopted by using outcomes that can be affected by feedback.

Feedback can fulfill a number of related outcomes: (a) directing subordinate behavior (i.e., helping the subordinate be more productive), (b) supplying information on the adequacy of employee performance to facilitate his/her self-evaluation (Hanser and Muchinsky, 1978; Larson, 1986), (c) building personal attractions with the source (Ilgen et al. 1979) and, (d) serving the selfish motives of the source (e.g., Giffin, 1967). The resulting structure of perceived supervisor intentions may change depending upon what criterion is selected to evaluate the clustering of responses within the range of possible intentions that subordinates perceive. To avoid the possible shortcomings of previous research, the second study employed five criteria. To be consistent with past studies, these criteria included frequency and four additional ones derived from the outcomes that feedback can effect as noted earlier.

These four outcome criteria are not offered as an exhaustive set. Instead, they were selected to represent the different outcomes that feedback can effect regardless of the original supervisor intent and

yet be affected significantly by perceptions of that intent. Therefore, the perceived intentions attributed to supervisor feedback can differentially contribute to distinct outcomes relevant to subordinates and their supervisors, such as facilitating subordinate performance. The selection of outcomes also was based on the need to use criteria that would be sufficiently distinct such that less response bias could result. These outcome criteria were used in conjunction with the frequency criterion to address two related questions. First, are there dimensions that are relatively stable across multiple criteria (frequency and outcomes)? The presence of such dimensions would facilitate future research efforts by eliminating the concern for the effects of specific criteria. Second, which criteria, if any, would yield unique supervisor feedback intention dimensions?

Method

Because of the developmental nature of this research, an extension of the previous research methodology was employed. Participants were asked to make multiple judgments about the 36 supervisor feedback intentions. One section of the questionnaire had participants rate how frequently they would estimate that supervisors provide performance feedback for each of the 36 intentions. Their responses were collected on a seven-point scale anchored at each level with "never" at the low extreme and "always" at the high extreme—a replication of the criterion used in prior research to determine feedback dimensions (Greller and Herold, 1975; Herold and Parsons, 1985). In addition, participants were instructed "to rate the extent to which receiving performance feedback for the 36 different intentions would contribute to each of the following four outcomes":

1. Facilitate your development as a more productive employee
2. Build an effective employee-supervisor relationship
3. Fit the supervisor's selfish (self-serving) motives
4. Help you assess how well you are performing your job

For these four outcomes, participants' responses were collected on a seven-point scale. Each scale point had an appropriate adjective with the scale end-points anchored by the adjectives "none" and "all."

Participants

The 220 participants for Study 2 were drawn from an introductory management course at a large northwestern university. They were

either juniors or seniors majoring in business administration (age $\overline{X}$ = 21.6; full-time work experience X = 50 months). Participants were instructed to use their own work experience when responding to the questionnaire. Participants received extra credit in the course for completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary.

Surveyed in one-hour sessions, the participants were run in groups of 15 to 30. One of the authors was in attendence at each session to provide initial instructions and to answer any questions. The purpose of the study was fully disclosed and no deception was employed. Once the instructions had been given and the purpose of the study had been explained, participants were given the opportunity to withdraw while still receiving extra credit. All participants chose to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Five factor analyses (one for each of the four outcome criteria and one for the frequency criterion) were conducted. The factor solutions were determined on the basis of a varimax rotation using the following two criteria: Cattell's (1966) scree test and the Kaiser-Guttman criterion (i.e., eigenvalue greater than one). The following decision rules were used to determine which items to include in the extracted factors: (a) an item had to have an absolute value factor loading greater than or equal to .40 on the extracted factor, and (b) the loading had to be at least .15 greater than the absolute value of the loading of this item on any other extracted factor. Items were permitted to be a part of only one extracted factor. As a result, there were no appreciable cross-loadings of items on more than one extracted factor. This analysis closely followed the suggestions of Ford, MacCallum, and Tait (1986) for using factor analysis in applied research. In order to assess the internal consistency of the extracted factors, alpha coefficients were computed for the scale created by items in each extracted factor.

Results

Based on Gorsuch (1974), it was concluded that a 5:1 subject-to-item ratio was sufficient for the exploratory nature of this research. For all of the following factor analyses, the subject-to-item ratio was in excess of 6:1. The resultant statistics from the five factor analyses which were performed on the data can be obtained from any of the authors. A tentative label was given to each factor according to the meaning of the item(s) that were loaded most highly

on it. Suggested generic labels are used across factor solutions to avoid the common pitfall of advocating diverse factor labels that may be subject to varying interpretations. Tracy (1986) has effectively argued against the false confidence that is often exhorted behind the factor labeling derived from a single exploratory study. Instead, hypothesized factor labels should be tested against alternative viable interpretations.

Across the five factor analyses four or five factors were extracted for each criterion, accounting for 42.7 to 49.4 percent of the common variance. In other words, the 36 supervisor intentions, depending on criterion, can be parsimoniously reduced to four or five independent underlying dimensions against which subordinates determine the supervisor's feedback intent. The alpha coefficients for scales comprising items that were loaded on their respective factors were all judged to be at an acceptable level, as they ranged from .67 to .89.

As Table 2 suggests, there appears to be a fairly stable taxonomy of factors across criteria. This taxonomy of perceived supervisor intentions during performance feedback clusters around four major themes: (a) supervisor dominance, (b) attentiveness to unit expectations, (c) subordinate nurturance, and (d) exhortation to increase subordinate performance. Supervisor dominance included perceived supervisor intentions to demonstrate his/her power or authority; to bolster his/her own self-image at respondent's expense; to cover his/her own shortcomings; to put respondent in his/her place; and, to belittle the respondent. Attentivness to unit expectations included perceived supervisor intentions to insure that subordinate performance meets departmental standards; to provide the standard that subordinates should use when evaluating his/her own performance; to provide subordinate with information on progress toward unit goals; to encourage a work group to perform as a team; and, to help subordinate perform the job with more efficiency and less effort. Subordinate nurturance included the following items: (a) to make subordinate feel more relaxed about work, (b) to bolster the self-image, and (c) to insure that subordinate does not store up any feelings of dissatisfaction. Exhortations to increase subordinate performance included perceived supervisor intentions to (a) have subordinates work harder, (b) increase productivity level, (c) change attitude of subordinate toward work, and (d) encourage subordinate to take the initiative and be creative.

Three of the twenty-two extracted factors did not readily fit under the four major themes. Supervisor intentions to ''correct subordinate behavior'' are perceived to contribute uniquely to the desired outcome of helping the subordinate with the task of self assessment.

TABLE 2
Supervisor Intention Taxonomy Grouped by Common Themes Across Criteria

CRITERIA	MAJOR THEMES				
	SUPERVISOR DOMINANCE	ATTEND TO UNIT EXPECTATIONS	SUBORDINATE NURTURANCE	INCREASE SUBORDINATE PERFORMANCE	
Frequency	Supervisor Dominance*	Attend to Unit Expectations	Subordinate Development	Increase Subordinate Performance	To Correct Subordinate Behavior*
Facilitate Subordinate Productivity	To Serve Supervisor's Needs Only	To meet or Exceed the Standard*		Encourage Subordinate Performance*	Nonconstructive Intentions
Build an Effective Relationship	Supervisor Dominance	Attend to Unit Expectations	Put Subordinate At Ease*	Increase Subordinate Performance for his/her own good	Make Subordinate Aware of Supervisor Viewpoint
Serve the Supervisor's self-serving motives	Supervisor Dominance*	Attend to Unit Expectations	Express Support for Subordinate	Increase Subordinate Performance	
Help with Subordinate Self-Assessment	Supervisor Dominance	Attend to Unit Expectations*	To Recognize Self-control of Performance	Increase Subordinate Performance	

* Factors with highest mean item rating for each criteria.

"Making the subordinate aware of the supervisor's view point" is perceived as an intention that will uniquely contribute to building an effective relationship with one's supervisor. Finally, a factor labeled "nonconstructive intentions," uniquely emerged as noncontributory to the facilitation of subordinate productivity.

The mean item frequency or contribution to the outcome criteria for each factor was calculated. Although the factor structure was fairly stable across criteria, there was considerable variance in the relative importance of each factor to its respective criterion. The frequency of the four supervisor intention factors were relatively equal with supervisor dominance perceived to occur most frequently. Supervisor intentions that encourage subordinate performance, and the meeting or exceeding performance standards both substantially contributed to facilitating subordinate productivity. Supervisor intentions to put the subordinate at ease made the greatest contribution to building an effective relationship. Supervisor intentions to dominate the subordinate contributed to the perception that the feedback only serves the supervisor's self-serving motives. Supervisor intentions to correct subordinate behavior and to draw the subordinate's attention toward the unit expectations were perceived as making the greatest contribution to helping the subordinate with self-assessment.

Discussion

Before discussing the results, one must address the use of student participants in this research. One criticism of the participation of students is that they are often employed as surrogates for organizational members. It has been found that when students are asked to "step up" into unfamiliar roles or to "project themselves" into organizationally sophisticated positions, the results are significantly affected (Barr and Hitt, 1986). However, in the studies reported in this paper, the students were asked about situations that were within their direct experience. They were not being forced to create an image of an unfamiliar context or a set of behaviors. Like all participants in questionnaire research, they had to draw upon memory-based information. In the second study, in which participants were asked to make relatively fine judgments, the recall process was facilitated by the fact that all those who participated were current job holders. However, it is acknowledged that the results may most validly generalize to lower level jobs. This generalization is not seen as a significant limitation, as there are

many jobs that fall into this category. The generalizability issue can only be fully assessed through future research.

The results summarized in Table 2 support the contention that subordinates possess an underlying multi-dimensional structure for perceiving supervisor feedback intentions. Upon receiving supervisor feedback, subordinates will likely draw upon four broad themes to interpret the supervisor's intentions: (a) to dominate the subordinate, (b) to focus subordinate attention on unit standards, (c) to support subordinates; and/or (d) to urge subordinates to increase productivity.

Based solely on the frequency criterion, subordinates perceive that it is more likely that supervisor intent is to dominate rather than to support or to assist the subordinate in achieving higher performance levels. Participants in this research believe that it is more common in their experience to have a supervisor whose feedback intention is punitive (e.g., "put them in their place," belittle them and/or demonstrate his/her power or authority). If this finding is generalizable, it raises the possibility that subordinates may hold a long-term, overall belief that supervisor feedback is more likely to punish than to support. This rather negative intention perception may cause subordinates to respond to feedback in ways not intended by their supervisors (French and Raven, 1959).

Previous research on performance appraisal purpose and feedback intentions has assumed constructive, positive outcomes either for the individual (i.e., developmental feedback) or the organization (i.e., assisting in administrative decisions.) It is evident from this study that "nonconstructive" intentions not only may exist, but also may play a significant role in the "sense-making" efforts of the subordinate. Subordinates recognize that supervisor feedback may be intended to reaffirm the subordinate's lower status within the organization. In addition, subordinates believe that supervisors manage by intimidation at least as often as they manage by showing concern for the employee's well-being or task accomplishment. As these results suggest a reason for subordinates responding inappropriately to feedback (e.g., dismissing it as an assertion of power), the problem area should be explored in more detail in future research.

The similarity of factor solutions across all five criteria offers convergent support for the existence of these four broad themes of perceived supervisor intentions. Overall, supervisor intentions are perceived by subordinates along two dimensions: (a) the extent to which the supervisor's intent is to support or dominate and (b) the supervisor's intent to provide or not to provide information to help the subordinate achieve performance goals. However, each out-

come criterion elicited a slightly different configuration and interpretation of the factor that fit under each theme.

For example, subordinate nurturance takes on a variety of refined interpretations depending on the feedback outcome criteria. Within the context of building an effective relationship, subordinate nurturance is interpreted as "putting the subordinate at ease." If the outcome criterion is to serve the supervisor's self-serving motives, subordinate nurturance is described as any "expression of support for the subordinate." The desire to help with subordinate self-assessment elicits a subordinate nurturance factor that can be best described as "recognizing the role of self-control in performance." Finally, the frequency criterion elicits a subordinate nurturance factor that is best described as subordinate development. Ilgen et al. (1979) suggested that the closer the source (e.g., self versus supervisor) to the recipient, the stronger the influence on the feedback process. It may also be true that the closer the supervisor intention factor is to the subordinate's self-image (i.e., how supportive is my supervisor of the subordinate), the more refined the supervisor intent perceptions across feedback outcomes.

Not all extracted factors fit into the four broad themes. Two singular factors each appeared to operate only within the context of one of the outcome criteria. If the feedback outcome is to build an effective supervisor-subordinate relationship, subordinates will perceive a supervisory intention to "make the subordinate aware of the supervisor's view point." If the feedback outcome is to help with subordinate self-assessment, subordinates will perceive a supervisory intention to "correct their behavior." Several related streams of research are suggested by this refined conceptualization of subordinate intention perceptions. First, additional studies involving a different array of purposes with different subject pools are needed to confirm the intention labels and structures derived from this effort. Second, research is needed on how perception of supervisor credibility, power, and intentions contribute to the feedback process. Perceived power may be a key factor both in determining the perception of supervisor credibility and intention, and in directly assessing the influence of the source in the recipient's response to the feedback. For example, subordinates may perceive that a new supervisor, whose power is seen as based on authority, is providing feedback to assert his/her position and, therefore, react negatively in spite of the supervisor's helpful intent.

Further research is also needed to understand the antecedent conditions that elicit varying subordinate perceptions of supervisor intentions. In part, this research suggests that subordinates initially

determine the intended outcome behind the supervisor's feedback, which, in turn, triggers different perceptions of supervisor intent. The more variant the supervisor's behavioral style and actual intent in giving the subordinate feedback, the greater the demand placed on the subordinate's "sense-making" capability to understand why the feedback is being given. Under such circumstances, the feedback recipient may exhibit a variety of information search behaviors (Ashford and Cummings, 1983) to help interpret the feedback message and its consquences.

A final research question that needs to be addressed concerns supervisor-subordinate agreement in their respective perceptions of the supervisor's feedback intention. It is possible that based on their relative work roles, differential power perceptions and intended feedback outcomes may occur. There may be differential perceptions of the supervisor's intentions. As supervisor feedback can be discounted because of its being misinterpreted or attributed to nonconstructive intentions, how can the supervisor alter his/her behavior, message content or perceived power to gain subordinate acceptance?

In each of these research efforts it will be important to investigate supervisor intentions from the subordinate's, not the supervisor's, perspective. The same feedback information may be interpreted differently when it is perceived to be given for a purpose, not intended by the supervisor. How these delineated subordinate perceptions of supervisor feedback intentions alter the feedback process is in need of further study.

In terms of practical implications, this current research raises some concerns. First, subordinates may frequently perceive feedback being provided for nonconstructive intentions. This kind of perception is likely to affect their reactions and responses to the feedback in as yet to be determined ways. Second, the performance appraisal and feedback literatures have not provided any guidance on how to recognize, deal with, or modify intention perceptions. There has been a tendency to focus largely on message characteristics when prescribing how to make feedback effective. Conversely, if intentions are determined from a broad range of source and situational cues, subordinate conclusions about intentions may be only partially under the control of the supervisor. What this suggests is that supervisors may have to be explicit about their intentions, debrief subordinates about why feedback has been received, or take into account other organizational occurrences when choosing when and under what conditions to provide feedback. Unfortunately, this picture of the feedback process is signif-

icantly more complex than simply making sure that the feedback is as positive as possible, specific, and timely. In spite of the drawbacks of this perspective, it should more accurately reflect the complexities that pervade modern day organizations than has been the situation in the past.

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