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FEEDBACK SEEKING FOLLOWING CAREER TRANSITIONS

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We examined how inquiring and monitoring for feedback from peers and supervisors changed over time for transferees. Hypotheses were grounded in uncertainty reduction and impression management theory. Results from a longitudinal study in which data were collected three times over a year indicated that monitoring for feedback from peers and supervisors remained constant over time, as did inquiry from supervisors, but that inquiry from peers declined. In addition, role clarity negatively influenced subsequent peer inquiry. Results suggest the need to examine how both uncertainty reduction and impression management concerns influence feedback seeking.

Career transitions, such as entering a new organization or transferring within an organization, are critical for both employees and organizations because they set the stage for employees' eventual success and longevity with their employers (Berlew & Hall, 1966). Previous research has identified feedback seeking as one method employees can use to gather information about their roles in their new environments (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). For employees, the value of feedback seeking comes from learning about the correctness and adequacy of their behavior for attaining desired end states (Ashford, 1986). Feedback seeking also has value for organizations because of its potential to enhance employee performance (Ashford & Cummings, 1983).

Employees go through transitions throughout their careers, as a part of ongoing assimilation, and not just during organizational entry (Jablin, 1987). For example, each year approximately 400,000 people undergo geographical job transfers when they move to new locations within the same organizations that have been employing them (Kiechel, 1987). Some research suggests that transferees' experiences may be similar to newcomers' because transferees also experience uncertainty concerning their new locations and work groups, but their adjustments may not be identical to those of organizational newcomers because they have a higher level of organizational knowledge (e.g., Feldman & Brett, 1983; Kramer, 1994; Kramer, Callister, & Turban, 1995). This contrast suggests the need to study other career transitions, in addition to initial organization entry.

The research reported here concerned the feedback-seeking behaviors of employees following career transitions. Specifically, we examined changes in the sources (peer and supervisor) and strategies (inquiry and monitoring) employees used in their feedback-seeking behaviors following transitions. Previous research suggests there are costs, as well as benefits, associated with feedback-seeking behaviors (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992). We theorized that the costs and benefits depend, in part, upon the timing, source, and strategy used to obtain feedback. Specifically, we theorized that although the value of feedback to employees is particularly high following career transitions, over time the value of certain types of feedback will decline as role clarity increases.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The socialization literature suggests that employees involved in transitions will initially engage in high levels of proactive behavior, such as feedback seeking, to reduce uncertainty about their new roles (Ashford & Black, 1996; Louis, 1980). As their role clarity increases, their feedback seeking will decline. In support of this conceptualization, in a cross-sectional study Ashford (1986) found that employees with longer company tenure were less inclined to seek feedback by inquiry than were newcomers. Although Morrison (1993b) did not find changes in feedback seeking over time in her

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field study, she suggested that her six-month time frame may have been too short a period in which to find changes. If *timing* and uncertainty reduction are the only influential factors, feedback seeking should decline over time.

In addition to timing, the *source* of feedback has also been examined by scholars interested in feedback seeking. Although some feedback may be inherent in a task itself (Herold & Greller, 1977), following transitions employees value feedback from interpersonal sources, such as supervisors and peers, who provide information that can help the employees evaluate their abilities or modify current behaviors (Feldman & Brett, 1983; Morrison, 1993b). Initially, inquiries to peers and supervisors may be equally valuable for reducing uncertainty. However, employees who have been on the job for some time may desire feedback from supervisors more than from peers because they recognize that supervisors control organizational rewards. Morrison and Bies (1991) suggested that impression management motives will lead individuals to select sources of feedback on the basis of reward power. This idea suggests that employees may continue to seek feedback from their supervisors either to gain appropriate organizational rewards or to create positive impressions even after uncertainty is reduced. However, there would be no similar benefit from seeking feedback from peers, so peer feedback seeking would be likely to decline over time as role clarity increases. In support of this idea, Ashford and Tsui (1991) found that experienced employees sought more feedback from supervisors than from peers. Similarly, evidence indicates the importance of supervisors as sources of information about jobs and organizations: information from supervisors, but not peers, has been associated with decision quality and perceived organizational knowledge (O'Reilly, 1977; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Therefore, supervisors appear to become a more important source of feedback over time than peers.

In addition to timing and source, the *strategy* for seeking feedback is likely to influence the frequency of its use. Ashford and Cummings (1983) expanded the understanding of feedback strategies by noting that in addition to passively receiving feedback, employees can actively seek it using two strategies: they can make direct requests, or *inquire*, for feedback, or they can observe—or *monitor*—other organization members to gain information. These two feedback-seeking strategies have different costs and benefits (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ashford & Tsui, 1991). In general, monitoring has minimal effort costs associated with its use, but it also has few benefits because it may not provide the desired information. Inquiry, because it is public, has both greater costs and greater benefits. It entails greater benefits because people obtain the specific feedback they desire, but additional costs result from the possibility that the person who inquires for feedback may be viewed as weak or insecure (Morrison & Bies, 1991). We theorize that the risk of inquiring for feedback is minimal for new transferees, who would be expected to have initial concerns about their performance. The risk of inquiring for feedback may increase over time if organizational insiders expect employees with longer tenures to be confident, independent, and knowledgeable. Employees may resolve this trade-off between the risks and benefits of seeking feedback by inquiring for feedback less frequently as the cost increases but continuing to seek feedback unobtrusively through monitoring supervisors and peers, at low risk and relatively low cost. A lab study by Levy, Albright, Cawley, and Williams (1995) supported this explanation. When subjects had to seek feedback publicly, feedback seeking declined over the four trials, suggesting the perceived costs of inquiry influenced feedback seeking.

Ashford and Northcraft (1992) found that when individuals who were performing well inquired for feedback, they assisted others (such as supervisors) in recognizing and acknowledging their good performance. This finding suggests that inquiring for feedback may have impression management benefits, at least for employees who are performing well. Furthermore, Edwards (1995) suggested that feedback seeking plays a larger role in impression management than it does in providing information on effective performance. More broadly, we theorize that individuals continue to inquire for information from supervisors who control valued rewards and punishments. Therefore, we expect that the motivation to manage the impressions of supervisors and to obtain information about how to perform correctly may help sustain the level of supervisor inquiry, although such benefits will not influence peer inquiry.

Taken together, the preceding arguments suggest that as job tenure increases, the costs and benefits of feedback are likely to change, shifting feedback-seeking patterns. In general, we propose that the cost of inquiry relative to that of monitoring increases over time and that the benefits of seeking feedback from peers decrease over time relative to those of seeking feedback from supervisors. This reasoning suggests a three-way interaction between source, strategy, and time, in which peer inquiry declines over time while other types of feedback seeking remain stable:

Hypothesis 1. Following career transitions, the frequency with which employees inquire for feedback from peers will decrease over time relative to other types of feedback seeking (supervisor inquiry and peer and supervisor monitoring), which will not change significantly over time.

The previous reasoning also suggests the following two-way interactions:

Hypothesis 2. There will be no significant difference in the frequencies of feedback seeking from peers and supervisors when employees are new in their positions; over time, employees will seek feedback using both inquiry and monitoring less frequently from peers than from supervisors.

Hypothesis 3. Following career transitions, employees will inquire for feedback less frequently over time from both peers and supervisors, but their level of monitoring for feedback will not change significantly over time.

One of the explanations for our model of feedback-seeking behavior is the concept of uncertainty reduction. The uncertainty reduction argument is that individuals in career transitions experience uncertainty (that is, they lack role clarity) and consequently seek feedback to reduce this uncertainty. Over time, as employees develop greater role clarity and satisfy their desire for evaluative information, they are likely to be less motivated to seek feedback. However, role clarity is not likely to affect levels of monitoring either peers or supervisors for feedback because the effort costs of obtaining this feedback are so minimal that the feedback obtained would still have value for helping to improve performance and gain organizational rewards, even after uncertainty has declined. Inquiring for feedback from supervisors is also likely to be maintained over time because employees may still be motivated to seek additional feedback for impression management purposes or to learn from those individuals who control organizational rewards. Thus, peer inquiry is the form of feedback seeking most likely to be affected by changes in the level of role clarity. Thus,

Hypothesis 4. Over time, role clarity will affect the level of subsequent feedback seeking, so that employees with higher levels of role clarity will engage in less feedback inquiry from peers than those with lower levels of role clarity. Over time, role clarity will have no significant influence on subsequent inquiring for feedback from supervisors and monitoring for feedback from either peers or supervisors.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

To test these hypotheses, we used a longitudinal research design to collect data from transferees employed by 15 organizations. Initially we collected baseline data about demographics and transferees' experiences in their old work locations prior to their transfers. To explore feedback-seeking behavior, we then collected data three additional times during the transferees' first years at their new locations. In general, previous research has suggested that employees take 3 to 12 months to adjust to new positions (Marshall & Cooper, 1976; Wanous, 1976). Morrison (1993a, 1993b) collected data at 1, 3, and 6 months but did not find changes over time and suggested that her collection period may have been too short. Therefore, we obtained time 1 data during respondents' first months in their new positions, to capture their initial experiences in the new locations; we collected time 2 data after 3 months in the new locations, with the expectation that this collection would capture a range of adjustment experiences; and we gathered time 3 data after 12 months in the new locations with the expectation that nearly all respondents would be adjusted to their new positions.

We contacted organizations with facilities in a southwestern state that commonly transfer employees and asked them to identify newly transferred employees for the study. A total of 15 organizations provided the names of 103 potential participants. The organizations (listed with the numbers of newly transferred employees each identified) included 9 business organizations (n = 40; 2 public utilities, 2 banks, 3 computer electronics firms, 1 insurance company, and 1 software company); 2 military units (n = 7); and 4 government agencies (n = 56; law enforcement, highways, social services, and recreation). We believe that our organizational contacts provided the names of all individuals transferred during the data collection period, although we cannot verify this. We contacted the 103 transferring individuals, explained the nature of the research, and requested their assistance. The 102 transferees who agreed to participate received individualized mailings according to their specific transfer dates. Initial questionnaires were returned by 91 respondents (89%). In the three subsequent data collections, 89 of the original 91 respondents (89%) returned time 1 questionnaires, 85 (83%) returned time 2 questionnaires, and 69 (68%) re-

turned time 3 questionnaires. We conducted analyses on the respondents ($n = 69$) who completed all three of the posttransfer questionnaires.

Respondents were predominantly young ($\bar{x} = 33.9$, s.d. = 7.7), male (74%), and married (63%), with about half having children (46%). Most respondents had received no previous transfer offers (63%), had been at their old job locations an average of 4.9 years (s.d. = 4.4), and viewed their transfers as lateral moves (62%). Most viewed themselves as in the middle or lower levels of their organizations (91%).

To assess the presence of nonrandom sampling error caused by attrition, we conducted a multiple logistic regression analysis in which the dependent variable was a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent remained in the study for all three analyzed data collections and the independent variables were the four feedback-seeking scales measured at time 1 (Goodman & Blum, 1996). This logistic regression was not significant, leading us to conclude that attrition did not bias our longitudinal data analyses (Goodman & Blum, 1996).

Measures

Feedback seeking. Although two scales exist for measuring feedback seeking using monitoring and inquiry (Ashford, 1986; Fedor et al., 1992), both of these scales distinguish between feedback-seeking strategies (monitoring or inquiry) but not between feedback-seeking sources (peers or supervisors). Ashford and Tsui (1991) did examine peer and supervisor differences, although their measures were designed to ask the potential *sources* of feedback—the supervisors, peers, and subordinates of the respondents—how frequently respondents had observed them or asked them for feedback. We felt that it was important to let respondents describe how frequently they monitored for feedback because some sources, such as supervisors, might not be aware of when monitoring occurs. As a result, we developed two scales for this study that were similar to Ashford's (1986) scales; one scale measured feedback seeking from supervisors and the other, feedback seeking from peers. Respondents indicated the extent to which statements about feedback seeking matched their experiences on five-point scales ranging from "never" to "very frequently." We analyzed each of these scales using principal components analysis with "varimax" rotation. Analysis of the "scree" plot and application of the criterion that eigenvalues be greater than 1.0 indicated two factors for each scale, one for inquiry and one for monitoring. For scale development, we retained items with loadings of at least .70 on a factor and not more than .30 on another factor. These results are shown in Table 1.

The scale for feedback seeking from peers yielded four items for inquiry ($\alpha = .88, .85$, and .86 at times 1, 2, and 3, respectively) and three items for monitoring ($\alpha = .82, .84, .78$). The scale for feedback seeking from supervisors also suggested two factors, with two items each for inquiry ($\alpha = .88, .83$, and .84) and monitoring ($\alpha = .72, .80, .56$).

To provide evidence concerning the relationships among our feedback-seeking measures and Ashford's (1986) measures, we administered a survey that included both Ashford's feedback-seeking items and our items to 80 full-time employees who were also business students. Examination of the correlations indicated that our measures of supervisor and peer inquiry had correlations of .78 and .69, respectively, with Ashford's inquiry scale. Our measures of supervisor and peer monitoring had correlations of .58 and .29, respectively, with Ashford's monitoring scale. Although all correlations were significant, the peer monitoring correlation was lower than expected; this low value may have resulted because Ashford's monitoring scale included only one item that clearly assessed peer monitoring. Taken in sum, the pattern of correlations suggests that our measures are similar to Ashford's measures and supports the construct validity of our measures.

Role clarity. Role clarity was measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) six-item role ambiguity instrument (five-point scales, $\alpha = .84$). The items, about half of which begin "I know. . .," have response choices ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." We did not reverse-code the items, as is normally done, but used them as written. When others (e.g., Morrison, 1993b) have used the scale this way, it has been referred to as role clarity rather than role ambiguity.

Control variables. Each respondent indicated his or her age, gender, tenure at the old location, and tenure in the old position on the first survey. We also measured organization type (business, military, or government agency). We controlled for all of these variables in the analyses examining feedback seeking over time because of concern that such variables might affect respondents' feedback-seeking behaviors.

Analyses

Testing Hypotheses 1–3: Changes in feedback seeking over time. In order to test Hypotheses 1–3, we conducted a two-by-two-by-three repeated-measures multivariate analysis of covariance

TABLE 1
Results of Factor Analysis of Feedback-Seeking Scales[a]

Item	Inquiry	Monitoring
Peer feedback seeking		
1. I ask my coworkers if I am doing a good job.	**.89**	.15
2. I ask my coworkers if I am meeting my job requirements.	**.86**	.17
3. I ask my coworkers if people like working with me.	**.80**	.13
4. I ask my coworkers what other people think I should be doing.	**.78**	.07
5. From their reactions, I can tell how well I am getting along with members of my work group.	.04	**.86**
6. Because of the reactions I receive from my coworkers, I can tell whether I am doing the things that should be done.	.15	**.83**
7. Through observing my coworkers' reactions, I can tell how well they think I am doing.	.21	**.79**
Eigenvalue	3.32	1.64
Percentage of variance explained	.47	.23
Alpha	.88	.82
Supervisor feedback seeking		
1. I ask my supervisor how I am doing.	**.92**	.12
2. I ask my supervisor if I am meeting all my job requirements.	**.91**	.17
3. From watching my supervisor, I can tell how well I am performing my job.	.10	**.88**
4. From watching my supervisor's reactions to what I do, I can tell how well my supervisor thinks I am doing.	.18	**.86**
Eigenvalue	2.13	1.12
Percentage of variance explained	.53	.28
Alpha	.88	.72

[a] Bold numbers indicate loadings of at least .70 on a factor and not more than .30 on another factor.

(MANCOVA). Strategy (monitoring or inquiry), source (peer or supervisor), and time (1, 3, or 12 months) were varied, and age, gender, organization type, and tenure at the old location and position were controlled. All variables were measured within-subjects. We followed the recommendations of statisticians (Keppel, 1982; Kirk, 1968) and tested our precise directional hypotheses using planned comparisons that specifically tested whether the data fitted our hypothesized pattern of means. These planned comparisons involved assigning a weight to each of the 12 feedback-seeking means (four feedback-seeking types assessed at three time points) so that the weights represented the specific hypothesized pattern of means proposed in each hypothesis. Therefore, each hypothesi : was tested with a different weighting of the means.

We recognized that in the same way an interaction qualifies interpretation of main effects (Kirk, 1968), a significant three-way interaction, as proposed in Hypothesis 1, might qualify interpretation of the two-way interactions (Hypotheses 2 and 3).

Testing Hypothesis 4: Role clarity and feedback seeking over time. We used structural equation modeling to test the effects of role clarity on subsequent feedback seeking by comparing a theoretical model, which includes a path from role clarity to feedback seeking, with an autoregressive null model. The autoregressive null model specifies that each variable at one time predicts itself, measured at the subsequent time period, but does not predict any other variable. The theoretical model differs from the autoregressive null model by containing an added path, from role clarity measured at an earlier time to the feedback-seeking variable measured at a later time. We would conclude that role clarity influenced subsequent feedback seeking if the path coefficient for this added path was significant ($t > 2.0$) and the results of a chi-square difference test comparing the null and theoretical models were also significant ($\Delta\chi^2 > 3.8$). These analyses were conducted separately for each of the four types of feedback seeking (peer inquiry, peer monitoring, supervisor inquiry, and supervisor monitoring) for the changes from time 1 to time 2 and from time 2 to time 3, resulting in eight different sets of analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlations are shown in Table 2. The means for type of feedback by time and the MANCOVA results are in Table 3.

TABLE 2
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations[a]

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Role clarity, time 1	3.58	0.69														
2. Role clarity, time 2	3.63	0.63	.75													
3. Role clarity, time 3	3.81	0.44	.54	.57												
4. Peer monitoring, time 1	3.45	0.73	.28	.12	.14											
5. Peer monitoring, time 2	3.48	0.77	.28	.31	.28	.57										
6. Peer monitoring, time 3	3.45	0.66	.00	.02	.06	.35	.49									
7. Supervisor monitoring, time 1	3.30	0.86	.26	.14	.23	.54	.40	.28								
8. Supervisor monitoring, time 2	3.32	0.82	.40	.42	.31	.53	.64	.32	.67							
9. Supervisor monitoring, time 3	3.40	0.69	.21	.22	.23	.24	.41	.38	.33	.54						
10. Supervisor inquiry, time 1	2.26	0.90	.21	.26	.05	.34	.36	.17	.41	.36	.18					
11. Supervisor inquiry, time 2	2.31	0.82	.19	.25	.11	.34	.39	.21	.25	.41	.09	.64				
12. Supervisor inquiry, time 3	2.38	0.86	.21	.14	.25	.32	.47	.26	.18	.32	.33	.47	.53			
13. Peer inquiry, time 1	2.14	0.89	.04	.14	.05	.37	.33	.21	.19	.13	.05	.69	.50	.42		
14. Peer inquiry, time 2	2.00	0.77	.17	.21	.07	.40	.43	.25	.17	.26	.11	.60	.59	.38	.71	
15. Peer inquiry, time 3	1.90	0.66	.18	.29	.13	.16	.41	.21	.07	.11	.17	.43	.41	.46	.57	.65

[a] For time 1, $n = 89$, and $p < .05$ if $r > .21$. For time 2, $n = 85$, and $p < .05$ if $r > .22$. For time 3, $n = 69$, and $p < .05$ if $r > .24$.

The planned comparison that tested Hypothesis 1, the three-way interaction of source, strategy, and time, was significant ($F_{1, 61} = 6.39$, $p < .001$), indicating that, as hypothesized, inquiry to peers declined over time, while inquiry to supervisors and monitoring of peers and supervisors remained constant over time.

The planned comparison for Hypothesis 2 was not significant ($F_{1, 61} = 0.25$, $p > .05$). Such results fail to support the hypothesis that initially transferees will report no difference in feedback seeking from peers or supervisors but that over time, they will seek feedback (through both inquiry and monitoring) less frequently from peers than from supervisors.

The planned comparison for Hypothesis 3 was significant ($F_{1, 61} = 5.82$, $p < .05$), indicating that inquiring for feedback (to both peers and supervisors) decreased over time, while monitoring for feedback remained stable over time.

In addition to these hypothesized relationships, "main effects" for strategy, source, and time were examined with MANCOVA analyses. Results indicated a main effect for strategy (respondents reported more monitoring than inquiry), although there were no main effects for source or time (see Table 3). Finally, although not shown in Table 3, additional analyses indicated that role clarity changed during these employees' transitions to their new jobs ($F_{2, 136} = 4.93$, $p < .01$). Specifically, role clarity at time 3 was significantly greater than at time 1 or time 2, and there were no differences in role clarity between time 1 and time 2.

Table 4 reports the results of a structural equation model testing whether role clarity influenced subsequent feedback seeking. Although all models

TABLE 3
Testing Hypotheses 1–3: Changes in Feedback Seeking over Time

(3a) Means and Standard Deviations[a]

Feedback-Seeking Behavior	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Peer monitoring	3.45	3.48	3.45
	(0.73)	(0.77)	(0.66)
Supervisor monitoring	3.30	3.32	3.41
	(0.89)	(0.82)	(0.69)
Supervisor inquiry	2.26	2.31	2.36
	(0.90)	(0.81)	(0.86)
Peer inquiry	2.14	2.00	1.89
	(0.89)	(0.77)	(0.66)

(3b) Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance[b]

Source	*df*	*F*
Planned comparisons[c]		
Hypothesis 1: Strategy × source × time	1, 61	6.39**
Hypothesis 2: Source × time	1, 61	0.25
Hypothesis 3: Strategy × time	1, 61	5.82*
Main effects		
Strategy	1, 61	5.23*
Source	1, 61	2.16
Time	2, 60	0.17

[a] $n = 69$.

[b] All effects were tested with a repeated-measures multivariate analysis of covariance in which age, gender, organization, and tenure at the old location and in the old position were controlled.

[c] The *F*-values reported from the tests of the hypothesized interactions are from the planned comparisons that tested the specific pattern of means proposed in each hypothesis.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4
Fit Indexes and Path Coefficients for Causal Models Predicting Feedback Seeking from Role Clarity[a]

Model	*df*	χ^2	*p*	$\Delta\chi^2$ [b]	GFI	NFI	Path Coefficient
Time 1 to time 2							
Monitoring, supervisors							
Autoregressive null	2	9.23	0.01		0.95		
Theoretical	**1**	**0.56**	**0.45**	**8.67**	**0.99**	**0.94**	**−0.24***
Monitoring, peers							
Autoregressive null	2	3.16	0.20		0.98		
Theoretical	1	1.00	0.32	2.16	0.99	0.68	−0.13
Inquiry, supervisors							
Autoregressive null	2	3.56	0.17		0.98		
Theoretical	1	2.72	0.10	0.84	0.98	0.26	0.08
Inquiry, peers							
Autoregressive null	2	6.69	0.04		0.96		
Theoretical	**1**	**2.62**	**0.10**	**4.07**	**0.95**	**0.61**	**−0.15***
Time 2 to time 3							
Monitoring, supervisors							
Autoregressive null	2	0.62	0.73		0.99		
Theoretical	1	0.62	0.43	0.00	0.99	0.00	0.00
Monitoring, peers							
Autoregressive null	2	2.99	0.22		0.98		
Theoretical	1	0.97	0.32	2.02	0.99	0.68	0.16
Inquiry, supervisors							
Autoregressive null	2	0.07	0.96		0.99		
Theoretical	1	0.03	0.86	0.04	0.99	0.57	−0.02
Inquiry, peers							
Autoregressive null	2	5.09	0.08		0.96		
Theoretical	**1**	**0.01**	**0.95**	**5.08**	**0.99**	**1.00**	**−0.21***

[a] In the highlighted (bold) models, the path coefficients are significant ($t > 2$), and the fits of the models improve significantly beyond the null. GFI is goodness of fit. NFI is the Bentler and Bonett (1980) normed fit index.

[b] The change in chi-square from the null model to the target model is shown.

* $p < .05$

tested fitted the data well (goodness-of-fit index values were greater than .90), in three cases the addition of the path from role clarity to subsequent feedback seeking improved the model fit. As hypothesized, role clarity negatively influenced subsequent peer inquiry for feedback both from time 1 to time 2 and from time 2 to time 3, providing strong support for Hypothesis 4. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, role clarity at time 1 was negatively related to supervisor monitoring at time 2 (3 months), suggesting that the value of monitoring supervisors declined somewhat as role clarity increased. Role clarity did not influence supervisor monitoring between times 2 and 3 (12 months).

DISCUSSION

This study extended career transition and feedback-seeking research by examining the feedback-seeking behaviors of transferees assessed at three time points during the first year following relocation. Results supported the hypothesized three-way interaction, with peer inquiry declining over time and other feedback-seeking strategies (peer and supervisor monitoring and supervisor inquiry) remaining stable. Results also indicated that monitoring remained constant but that inquiry declined over time, primarily owing to the decline of peer inquiry. As hypothesized, role clarity was negatively related to peer inquiry at subsequent measurement times. In contrast to our hypothesis, role clarity at time 1 was negatively related to supervisor monitoring at time 2, but role clarity at time 2 was not negatively related to time 3 supervisor monitoring. Finally, results did not show that feedback was sought less frequently from peers than from supervisors over time. Overall, these results have a number of implications for organizational studies.

Implications for Future Research

The results of this study are consistent with uncertainty reduction and impression management theories. For example, the decline in peer inquiry over time, particularly as role clarity increased, supports uncertainty reduction theory. As uncer-

tainty decreased, peer inquiry for feedback decreased. The finding that transferees with low role clarity monitored supervisors more than those with high role clarity is also consistent with uncertainty reduction theory. Originally we expected that role clarity would not affect monitoring because of monitoring's low costs. However, it may be that transferees with high levels of role clarity after one month are people who have experienced relatively few changes following their transfers, possibly because their current positions are very similar to their previous positions, and as a result they do not feel the need to monitor supervisors for feedback. Those with low role clarity appeared to feel motivated by uncertainty to monitor supervisors. The stability of the other types of feedback seeking over time provides additional support for impression management explanations of feedback seeking. Continued feedback monitoring provides information that employees can use to maintain a positive impression at relatively low cost; inquiring from supervisors who control rewards allows subordinates to draw attention to their performance and thus create a positive impression.

In prior research based on uncertainty reduction theory, uncertainty reduction has generally been considered an autonomous motivation for seeking information (Anderson, 1996). Similarly, research based on impression management theory has generally not addressed alternative motives that might influence information seeking. Our results suggest that employees in transition appear to balance their need for information resulting from uncertainty with their need to manage impressions, resulting in patterns of behavior that are different from what would be predicted by either theory alone. Further research could continue to examine how employees balance these and other competing motives in their feedback seeking.

Additional implications of these issues concern employees' relationships with peers and supervisors. Evidence suggests that the quality of the relationships with supervisors and peers influences the perceived social cost of feedback seeking and that as the perceived costs increase, use of inquiry decreases and use of monitoring increases (Teboul, 1995). Employees may seek feedback more frequently from peers and/or supervisors with whom they have higher-quality relationships than from individuals with whom they have poorer relationships; the quality of the relationship may influence their comfort level in seeking feedback. Therefore, managers might consider emphasizing the importance of established supervisors and peers developing positive relationships with new or transferred employees to support these new employees in seeking feedback during their transitions.

It is also important to consider that the type of transition may influence the transition process (Schlossberg, 1981). Most likely those who experience geographic relocations tend to experience only a moderate amount of uncertainty during the transition, less than what newcomers just entering an organization will experience but possibly more than what those simply changing jobs within an organization without relocating will experience. Differences in the magnitude of change are likely to lead to variance in uncertainty and impression management concerns, affecting feedback seeking. For example, previous research has shown that, compared to new "regular hires," temporary employees perceive fewer social costs in seeking information but also are less motivated to reduce uncertainty, and new regular hires perceive higher costs but apparently use information giving (providing others with their own knowledge, expertise, or suggestions) as an impression management technique (Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997). As further research clarifies the relationship between uncertainty reduction and impression management concerns, supervisors and peers can become more aware of the feedback needs of employees in transition.

Finally, an issue that could be studied further is the assumption that changes over time are linear. There may be a point at which individuals dramatically reduce feedback seeking. For example, following a first performance review, it is likely that uncertainty reduction and impression management concerns would significantly change on the basis of the feedback obtained. These changes are likely to influence future feedback-seeking behaviors.

Limitations

The results of this study should be viewed with a few potential limitations in mind. Because the data were self-reported on surveys, there is some risk that they do not reflect objective reality, in part because respondents may not have accurate perceptions of their own behaviors. Nonetheless, surveys are an excellent method of collecting employees' own assessments of whether they have engaged in feedback seeking (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). Self-assessment of behaviors such as monitoring for feedback is important because it can be difficult for peers and supervisors to assess this construct accurately (Ashford, 1986). In addition, longitudinal data collection reduces the potential for self-report or consistency bias.

The respondents in this study appeared to be a

representative cross section of employed adults. We controlled for the three different types of organizations (business, government, and military) that employed the respondents and found no effect on transferees. Nonetheless, we do not know how closely our findings will fit other employees in transition, such as employees changing jobs or newcomers entering an organization for the first time. Also, the relatively small sample size may have limited the power to detect certain statistical relationships, although it does not detract from the positive findings. In addition, this sample exceeds the recommended minimum sample size suggested by Bentler and Chou (1987) for the structural equation analyses conducted.

Although we had a rationale for our three post-transition data collection times, previous research does not provide empirical justification or firm guidelines concerning the optimal times to collect data during transitions. Transitions into new positions are gradual, and using even three or four measurements still provides a rather coarse indication of sometimes subtle processes. In the future, attempts could be made to capture the process more fully through other methods, such as experiential sampling (Williams & Alliger, 1994), in which respondents record their feelings, attitudes, and experiences whenever a programmed wristwatch alarm sounds.

CONCLUSION

Despite these limitations, we believe that this study contributes to understanding the patterns of feedback seeking following career transitions, showing that feedback seeking varies over time with different strategies and sources of feedback. Although employees initially seek feedback from both peers and supervisors, they inquire for feedback from peers less over time. Also, as role clarity improves, the value of the feedback acquired from peers apparently no longer offsets the costs of seeking the feedback, resulting in reduced levels of subsequent peer inquiry. These results provide further evidence that supervisors are a critical element in feedback. Organizations may benefit from trying to increase opportunities for employees to seek feedback from their supervisors and encouraging supervisors to provide unrequested feedback to employees following career transitions. Unrequested feedback is valuable to employees in transition (Kramer et al., 1995) and is not as subject to interpretation errors as monitoring for feedback is (Morrison, 1993b). Researchers should continue to investigate the behaviors of employees involved in career transitions, particularly the effects of various types of transitions, the magnitude of these transitions, and the employees' relationships with their peers and supervisors.

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