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When uncertainty counteracts feedback seeking: The effects of interpersonal uncertainty and power on direct feedback seeking

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Individuals often do not seek as much performance feedback as they actually need in order to adapt to their environment and to improve their performance. The aim of the present research is to examine which individuals are less likely to seek feedback and what their underlying motives are. Across three studies, we argue and show that individuals are less likely to seek feedback when they experience high (vs. low) interpersonal uncertainty, particularly when they feel powerful. As expected, stronger ego-protective motives and weaker image-enhancement motives among powerful individuals who feel interpersonally uncertain explain these findings. The discussion focuses on how these findings contribute to the understanding and promotion of feedback seeking in organizations.

Keywords: Feedback seeking; Power; Interpersonal uncertainty; Feedback-seeking motives.

Feedback on performance can help individuals to improve self-assessment and to adjust their goal-directed behaviour (for reviews, see Fishbach, Eyal, & Finkelstein, 2010; Lundgren, 2004). Because unsolicited feedback is scarce in most organizations (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Tourish & Robson, 2003), individuals may greatly benefit from seeking feedback in a proactive manner (for reviews, see Anseel, Lievens, & Levy, 2007; Ashford et al., 2003). However, to the detriment of personal performance and organizational success, individuals often do not seek as much feedback as they actually need (Tourish & Robson, 2003, 2006). The reason may be that, apart from instrumental motives, which are geared towards seeking feedback in order to meet goals and regulate behaviour, other motives may also play a role in the tendency to seek feedback. Specifically, self-based motives, such as the ego-based motive (focused on protecting the ego) and the image-based motive (focused on enhancing one's public image), have been identified as important determinants of feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2003; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003).

The present study aims to show that these self-based motives may explain why, at times, uncertainty may negatively affect feedback seeking. Previous researchers

have focused mainly on task or role uncertainty, and have found that this increases feedback seeking because it strengthens the instrumental motive (also known as the uncertainty-reduction motive; Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). In contrast, we argue that *interpersonal* uncertainty may decrease feedback seeking by affecting the self-based motives. We conceptualize interpersonal uncertainty as the inability to predict and explain one's own and others' behaviour in a given interaction (Hogg, 2000; Sedikides, De Cremer, Hart, & Brebels, 2010; Sorrentino & Roney, 2000). Interpersonal uncertainty, therefore, causes individuals to experience tension in social situations. This may decrease their confidence in seeking feedback from their interaction partners as a means of making a favourable impression (i.e., it reduces their image-enhancement motivation). Instead, it may cause them to focus on protecting their self-view from the potential threats that are inherent in receiving feedback (i.e., it increases their ego-defence motivation). Because individuals who experience more interpersonal uncertainty are likely to experience lower image-related benefits and higher ego-related costs, they may be less inclined to seek feedback. We further argue that not all individuals are equally susceptible to factors that have a bearing on their self-view and image (cf. Sedikides &

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Strube, 1997). Specifically, we expect that the effects of interpersonal uncertainty on feedback seeking will be more pronounced for individuals who feel more powerful (Studies 1 and 2). We further hypothesize that this effect is due to stronger ego-protective motives and weaker image-enhancement motives among interpersonally uncertain high-power individuals (Study 3).

INTERPERSONAL UNCERTAINTY AND FEEDBACK-SEEKING MOTIVES

Feedback-seeking behaviour can be defined as the conscious devotion of effort to determining the correctness and adequacy of one's behaviours for attaining valued goals (Ashford, 1986). Although feedback can be sought through monitoring, entailing observation of the situation and one's environment, in most organizational settings people seek feedback by directly asking others for it, also known as the inquiry method (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). In the uncertainty reduction theory, uncertainty has been put forward as the leading motive behind direct feedback seeking (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Morrison, 2002). The general idea behind this theory is that people have an aversion to uncertainty and will gather information, for instance, through seeking feedback, in order to reduce their feelings of uncertainty. Put differently, when an individual feels uncertain in a particular situation, feedback seeking has high instrumental value because it facilitates uncertainty reduction. In line with the premises of this theory, the findings of several studies show that when individuals are uncertain about their task performance or about their task roles they seek more feedback (Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999).

However, uncertainty does not always seem to lead to more feedback seeking. In fact, some studies have shown that it may lead to less feedback seeking (Ashford, 1986; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992), causing some researchers to call for more research that may help to clarify the matter (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). In this respect, it may be helpful to realize that uncertainty may also originate from sources other than one's tasks or roles. Indeed, one of the main sources of uncertainty originates in individuals' perceived ability to predict their own and others' behaviour during social interactions. Given that direct feedback seeking, in terms of active interpersonal inquiry, requires social interaction, uncertainty regarding those interactions is likely to affect the probability that feedback will be sought. We argue that this type of uncertainty—interpersonal uncertainty—may reduce feedback seeking.

Interpersonal uncertainty implies that individuals do not know what to expect when they interact with the other person, that they cannot predict the other's behaviour, and that they do not know how they will or should react to the behaviour that the other may exhibit (cf.

Hogg & Mullin, 1999). Like other forms of uncertainty, interpersonal uncertainty is highly unpleasant for individuals who experience it (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Neuliep & Grohskopf, 2000). Yet, in contrast to people who, for instance, face role or task uncertainty, people who experience interpersonal uncertainty are not likely to perceive feedback seeking as effective in reducing their uncertainty. We argue that this form of uncertainty is likely to bring the two other motives that have been identified in the feedback-seeking literature to the fore: ego-based and image-based motives (often referred to as self-enhancement motives in the social psychological literature; Anseel et al., 2007; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). More specifically, we posit that interpersonal uncertainty increases individuals' motivation to protect their ego and decreases their motivation to enhance their image when seeking feedback in interpersonal interactions. This idea is grounded in several theoretical perspectives. For instance, Cunningham (1988) and Sedikides (1992) both argue that individuals experiencing unpleasant states are particularly likely to turn inwards and to focus on averting danger or potential threats, unlike individuals experiencing pleasant states, who tend to focus on others in their environment and on the potential to gain rewards. This suggests that interpersonal uncertainty may reduce individuals' focus on their social environment, and make concerns about how to protect themselves more dominant. Supporting this view, research has indicated that the more uncertainty individuals experience in a relationship, the harder they try to avoid threats to their self-view (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004) and the more strongly they react to situations in which their ego is threatened (Foley, Heath, & Chabot, 1986). Similarly, individuals who perceive others as more unpredictable are more motivated to avoid shame and threats to their ego (Elliot & Reis, 2003), and people who experience discomfort and anxiety when having to interact with others tend to focus more on internal cues than on external cues (Mansell, Clark, & Ehlers, 2003).

Importantly, both the ego-protective motive and the image-enhancement motive influence direct feedback seeking because they affect the assessment of the costs and benefits associated with the feedback seeking (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). People who regard direct feedback seeking as an opportunity to enhance their image perceive it as having greater benefits and are, thus, more inclined to seek feedback in a direct manner. In contrast, individuals who regard direct feedback seeking as a threat to their ego perceive it as entailing higher costs and are, accordingly, less likely to seek feedback in a direct manner. In line with the cost-value analysis perspective of feedback seeking, the findings of several studies indicate that a high image-enhancement focus increases feedback seeking whereas a high ego-defence motive decreases feedback seeking (see Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison & Bies, 1991 for

reviews; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002). In sum, we argue that high ego-protective motives and low image-enhancement motives underlie the negative effects of interpersonal uncertainty on direct feedback seeking.

POWER AFFECTS THE LINK BETWEEN INTERPERSONAL UNCERTAINTY AND MOTIVES

Importantly, the identification of likely motives underlying the effect of interpersonal uncertainty on direct feedback seeking also provides us with the opportunity to identify potential moderators of this effect. We argue that the influence of interpersonal uncertainty on direct feedback seeking will be especially strong in those individuals for whom high private and public regard are highly relevant. Ultimately, for these individuals, direct feedback seeking is particularly associated with high ego-costs and low image-benefits when they feel uncertain. High private and public regard are especially important for powerful individuals (cf. Fast & Chen, 2009; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), narcissists (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), individuals with high but unstable self-esteem (Kernis & Lakey, 2010; Kernis, Lakey, & Heppner, 2008), and individuals living in high-status identity cultures (where status accrues to one by birth-right or gender; Sully de Luque & Sommer, 2000). In the present research, we focus on power because it is power that is omnipresent in organizational contexts. Wherever people group together to accomplish some mutual goal, a hierarchy is bound to develop and some individuals will have, and perceive themselves to have, more control over resources and other people's behaviour than others (cf. Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010; Tjosvold & Wisse, 2009). Given the importance of power in most organizational contexts, examining its moderating effect in the relationship between interpersonal uncertainty and direct feedback seeking is relevant from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.

Powerful individuals, or individuals who have a high capacity to influence others (Copeland, 1994; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), exhibit an exaggerated sense of self and are prone to experience feelings of self-deservingness and entitlement (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010; Wojciszke & Struzynska-Kujalowicz, 2007). Moreover, their environment perceives powerful individuals as more competent and successful than the powerless, and offers them respect and admiration (cf. Humphrey, 1985; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Their high self-view and favourable public regard are not only pleasant for the power holders, but also help them to maintain and enhance their power, making these valuable resources that need to be fostered and protected. Indeed, a highly positive self-view provides the powerful with the confidence and sense of self-deservingness

necessary to assert their will (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Lammers et al., 2010). Moreover, the respect and admiration that powerful individuals receive increases their impact on others in their environment (Milgram, 1974). Given the advantages of a high self-view and status for powerful individuals, interpersonal uncertainty, with its strong association with ego- and image-related motives, is likely to exert particularly strong effects on these individuals. Supporting this view, it has been shown that powerful individuals are particularly susceptible to factors that can influence their public or private regard. Fast and Chen (2009) indicated that powerful individuals react more strongly to factors that pose a threat to their self-view than powerless individuals do. More precisely, only among powerful individuals did a perceived lack of competence (i.e., an ego threat) lead to aggression, a typical ego-defence mechanism. Importantly, self-affirmation eliminated the effect of incompetence on aggression in powerful individuals, supporting the idea that ego-defensiveness drives the enhanced tendency of powerful individuals to exhibit aggressive behaviour when they feel incompetent. These findings suggest that, under conditions of interpersonal uncertainty, powerful individuals see more reason to protect their ego and less opportunity to enhance their image than do powerless individuals. This, in turn, should affect their feedback-seeking behaviour. In line with this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Power moderates the relationship between interpersonal uncertainty and direct feedback seeking such that, particularly among high-power individuals, interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 2: Ego-protective and image-enhancement motives mediate the interactive effect of interpersonal uncertainty and power on direct feedback seeking such that, particularly among high-power individuals, interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking through stronger ego-protective motives and weaker image-enhancement motives.

STUDY 1

We tested the expected relationships in three studies. In order to increase confidence in the reliability and external validity of our findings, we used different operationalizations of our independent variables interpersonal uncertainty and power, using measures as well as manipulations (cf. De Cremer et al., 2010). Our first study was a field study among school instructors in Germany. We examined whether instructors' perceived interpersonal uncertainty was negatively related to direct feedback seeking to the extent that they experienced higher power.

Method

Participants and procedure

A total of 99 instructors (49 female, 48 male, two not specified) working at vocational (58.6%) or grammar schools (39.4%; 2% not specified) in Germany participated voluntarily in our study. According to company policies, the instructors were classified into age groups (younger than 30 years: 7.1%; 30–40 years: 20.2%; 41–50 years: 33.3%; 51–60 years: 32.3%; older than 60 years: 6.1%; not specified: 1.0%). The instructors' students were typically between 15 and 20 years old. The culture at secondary schools in Germany encourages open communication between instructors and students. The instructors filled in a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. They were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously. Because the questionnaire was to be completed at work, we kept it short and to the point.

Measures

All measures, unless otherwise stated, were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("does not apply at all") to 7 ("applies absolutely").

Power. Instructors' perceived power in their relationships with students was measured using the eight-item sense of power scale developed by Anderson, John, and Keltner (2012). Sample items are, "In my relationship with my students, I have a great deal of power" and "In my relationship with my students, I can get them to do what I want"; $\alpha = .73$).

Interpersonal uncertainty. To assess instructors' uncertainty in interactions with their students, we adapted the nine-item uncertainty scale by Ashill and Jobber (2010). A (reversed) sample item is, "How often do you feel that you know what the best way is to respond to your students' behaviour toward you?" ($\alpha = .92$). Participants provided their answers on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 7 ("always").

Direct feedback seeking. Direct feedback seeking was measured using a three-item scale based on Ashford and Tsui (1991). A sample item is, "If I want to know what my students think about (aspects of) my lessons, I directly ask them for their opinion" ($\alpha = .91$).

Analyses and results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are displayed in Table 1. To test our first hypothesis that interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking to the extent that individuals experience higher power, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. Power and uncertainty (mean centred, cf. Aiken & West, 1991) were entered in Step 1, and the power by

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the variables of study 1 ($N = 99$), Study 2 ($N = 267$) and Study 3 ($N = 210$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
Study 1					
1. Power	5.05	0.76			
2. Uncertainty	3.44	0.93	-.28**		
3. Direct feedback seeking	5.30	1.36		.19	
Study 2					
1. Power	5.37	0.90			
2. Direct feedback seeking	4.53	1.48		.17**	
Study 3					
1. Image-enhancement motives	5.04	1.49			
2. Ego-protective motives	2.98	1.47		.20**	
3. Direct feedback seeking	4.41	1.73			-.26**

** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Interaction between interpersonal uncertainty and power on feedback seeking (Study 1).

uncertainty interaction was entered in Step 2.¹ The findings revealed a main effect of uncertainty on direct feedback seeking, $b = -0.43$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(96) = -2.96$, $p < .01$, showing that more interpersonally uncertain instructors were less likely to seek feedback from their students. More importantly, the Power $\times$ Uncertainty interaction was significant, $b = -0.39$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(95) = -2.06$, $p = .042$; $R^2 = .15$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$ (see Figure 1). In line with our hypothesis, simple slopes analysis indicated that uncertainty negatively affected direct feedback seeking at higher levels of power (1 SD above the mean), $b = -0.69$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(95) = -3.61$, $p < .001$, but not at lower levels of power (1 SD below the mean), $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.22$, $t(95) = -0.43$, ns .

¹We did not control for any covariates because they often serve the purpose of making nonsignificant findings significant (Becker, 2005). Including various controls (gender and job tenure in Study 1 and gender, job tenure, organizational tenure, and working hours per week in Studies 2 and 3), however, does not change the pattern or significance of our results. The number of control variables assessed in Study 1 was limited due to organizational policies.

STUDY 2

The findings of Study 1 provide important evidence for our hypothesis that uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking to the extent that individuals experience higher power. Our goal in Study 2 was to replicate and extend these results in order to bolster confidence in our findings. To be able to draw causal conclusions from our research, we supplemented our cross-sectional set-up in Study 1 with an experimental design.

Method

Participants and design

A total of 267 supervisors from a diverse set of industries in the United States (133 female, 134 male, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.98$, $SD = 10.35$) participated in our online field experiment. The supervisors had an average of 9.10 direct subordinates ($SD = 9.54$). Their average tenure on the current job was 4.17 years ($SD = 3.39$), and their average work experience was 13.90 years ($SD = 9.20$). Respondents with a higher education (i.e., bachelor's degree or higher) made up 59.2% of the sample. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two interpersonal uncertainty conditions (interpersonal uncertainty: high vs. low). Power was added to the design as a continuous moderator.

Procedure

We recruited supervisors using Amazon's Mechanical Turk Website to participate in a paid (1 Dollar) online study, and we guaranteed them confidentiality and anonymity. Given the ever-increasing number of people with Internet access, Internet recruitment methods have become increasingly popular among researchers, and their use has been approved by the American Psychological Association's Board of Scientific Affairs' Advisory Group (Kraut et al., 2004). In line with this positive assessment, research has shown that findings from online studies (surveys as well as experimental designs) are consistent with those of more traditional studies. In their early review on the validity of web-based psychological research, Krantz and Dalal (2000), for instance, concluded that there is an evident match between the findings from online studies and those from laboratory research. Similarly, Paolacci, Chandler, and Ipeirotis (2010), who tested classic experimental tasks in a Mechanical Turk sample, another online sample, and an offline sample, found no substantial differences between the samples and they were able to replicate previous research findings. Other research has also pointed to the high quality of data collected using Mechanical Turk. Buhrmester and colleagues (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), for instance, concluded that Mechanical Turk participants are more demographically diverse than standard Internet samples or college samples and that the data obtained using Mechanical Turk are at least as

reliable as those obtained using traditional methods. Despite the evidence pointing to the quality of Mechanical Turk data, we took several measures to further safeguard data quality in our studies. To ensure that our findings would be based only on the responses of those participants who completed the study in one sitting, we set a time limit of 1 hour, after which the study shut down automatically. Moreover, as recommended by Mason and Suri (2012), to filter out invalid responses we used instructed response items, such as "On this item please answer the following: absolutely", which was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all", 7 = "absolutely"). A wrong answer on any of these simple instructed response items clearly indicates that the participants were not paying attention to the questions; therefore, these participants were not included in the analyses.

Interpersonal uncertainty manipulation. We manipulated interpersonal uncertainty using an uncertainty prime (cf. Smith, Hogg, Martin, & Terry, 2007). The prime was introduced as an unrelated study, ostensibly geared towards collecting information about participants' long-term memory. We asked supervisors in the interpersonal uncertainty condition to vividly recall and write about an interaction with their subordinates in which they felt uncertain, that is, an interaction in which they were unable to predict their subordinates' behaviour and the way they themselves should or would react to it. In contrast, we asked supervisors in the interpersonal certainty condition to vividly recall and write about an interaction with their subordinates in which they felt certain: that is, an interaction in which they were able to predict their subordinates' behaviour and the way they themselves should or would react to it. To ensure that supervisors' handling of the situation (i.e., how they resolved the issue) would not affect our manipulation, we stressed that we were only interested in the specifics of the situation and their concurrent feelings.

Measures

All responses to the questionnaire were assessed using 7-point scales (1 = "not at all", 7 = "absolutely").

Power. Prior to the uncertainty manipulation, supervisors' perceived power in their relationships with their subordinates was assessed using the perceived position power scale by Yukl and Falbe (1991). A sample item is, "I can do things to increase my subordinates' chances of getting a pay raise or bonus" ($\alpha = .87$).

Manipulation check. To check the successfulness of our interpersonal uncertainty manipulation we used a five-item scale specifically developed for this study. Supervisors indicated the extent to which they felt "insecure", "uncertain", "certain" (R), "undetermined", "secure" (R), and "unsure" ($\alpha = .92$) in the situations they described.

Direct feedback seeking. As a measure of direct feedback seeking, we asked supervisors to point out how they would ask their subordinates for feedback concerning their performance as a leader. Supervisors indicated the extent to which they would (a) directly ask for their subordinates' opinion, (b) directly ask for information concerning their performance, (c) directly ask their subordinates how they were doing, (d) directly ask their subordinates what they think about their performance as a leader and (e) not beat around the bush in asking for feedback ($\alpha = .89$).² Given that restricting participants' time investment was less of an issue in this Mechanical Turk study than in the previous field study, we extended the scale used in Study 1 to a five-item scale. This allowed us to ensure a broader sampling of the domain of feedback seeking.

Analyses and results

In all reported regression analyses the main effect terms for uncertainty (dummy coded .5 and $-.5$ for high and low uncertainty, respectively) and power (mean centred, cf. Aiken & West, 1991) were entered in Step 1, and the power by uncertainty interaction was entered in Step 2. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are displayed in Table 1.

Manipulation check

As expected, the regression analysis on the uncertainty manipulation check revealed only a main effect of interpersonal uncertainty, $b = 2.15$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(263) = 14.72$, $p < .001$. Supervisors in the high-uncertainty condition indicated higher perceived uncertainty ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.16$) than those in the low-uncertainty condition ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.20$).

Hypothesis testing

Our first hypothesis stated that interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking to the extent that individuals experienced higher power. The findings of the regression analysis of interpersonal uncertainty and power on direct feedback seeking revealed a main effect of power, $b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(264) = 2.53$, $p = .01$, showing that supervisors who experienced more power were more likely to request feedback than those who experienced less power. More importantly, the Power $\times$ Uncertainty interaction was significant, $b = -0.42$, $SE = 0.20$, $t(263) = -2.06$, $p = .037$, $R^2 = .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$. In line with our hypothesis, simple slopes analysis indicated that interpersonal uncertainty affected direct feedback seeking at higher levels of power (1 SD above the mean), $b = -0.66$, $SE = 0.25$, $t(263) = -2.63$, $p < .01$, but not at lower

levels of power (1 SD below the mean), $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.26$, $t(263) = 0.36$, ns .

STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 yielded consistent evidence in support of our hypothesis that interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to feedback seeking to the extent that individuals experience higher power. Our goal in Study 3 was to examine whether stronger ego-protective and weaker image-enhancement motives underlie the enhanced effects of interpersonal uncertainty in powerful individuals compared with powerless individuals. We hypothesized that high interpersonal uncertainty would lead to less direct feedback seeking than low interpersonal uncertainty for individuals who experienced high power (but not for individuals who experienced low power), because high interpersonal uncertainty would be associated with stronger ego-protective motives and weaker image-enhancement motives than low interpersonal uncertainty among powerful individuals (see Figure 2).

Method

Participants and design

A total of 210 supervisors from a diverse set of industries in the United States and Canada (104 female, 101 male, five not specified; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.20$, $SD = 10.40$) participated in our 2 (power: high vs. low) $\times$ 2 (uncertainty: high vs. low) online scenario experiment. The supervisors had an average of 12.05 direct subordinates ($SD = 17.10$). Their average tenure on the current job was 4.09 years ($SD = 3.59$) and their average work experience was 13.08 years ($SD = 9.43$). Respondents with a higher education (i.e., bachelor's degree or higher) made up 54.6% of the sample. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to that of Study 2. We recruited supervisors using Amazon's Mechanical Turk website (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010) to participate in a paid (1 Dollar) online study. We guaranteed anonymity and regulated the maximum time to complete the study (1 hour).

Power manipulation. Power was manipulated using an experimental power prime (Galinsky et al., 2008; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Supervisors in

Figure 2. Mediated moderation model: Interaction between interpersonal uncertainty and power on feedback seeking mediated by ego-protective and image-enhancement motivation (Study 3).

²Using the same three feedback-seeking items in Study 2 as in Study 1 did not affect the direction or significance of our findings.

the high (low) power condition were asked to vividly recall an incident in their lives when they had power over another person (another person had power over them) and to describe how they felt in that situation.

Interpersonal uncertainty manipulation. Interpersonal uncertainty was manipulated in a short scenario. Participants were to imagine that they were in a leadership position at a pharmaceutical company and that they were soon going to have a meeting with a subordinate concerning the subordinate's performance. To stress that they did not feel uncertain about the task at hand, participants in both conditions were informed that the fact that they had to discuss the subordinates' performance per se did not worry them. However, in the interpersonal uncertainty condition, participants read that they felt uncertain because they were unable to anticipate how the subordinate would behave during the conversation and because they did not know how they should treat the subordinate. In the interpersonal certainty condition, participants read that they felt certain because they were able to anticipate how the subordinate would behave during the conversation and because they knew how they should treat the subordinate.

Measures

All questionnaire responses were assessed using 7-point scales (1 = "not at all", 7 = "absolutely").

Manipulation checks. To assess the successfulness of the power manipulation, we asked supervisors to indicate to what extent they felt "in control", "powerful", "independent", "weak" (R), "dominant", "dependent" (R), "powerless" (R), and "in charge" in the situation they described ($\alpha = .94$; cf. Lammers et al., 2010). To check the successfulness of the uncertainty manipulation, we asked supervisors to answer the same five items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .81$).

Direct feedback seeking. To assess the extent to which supervisors would seek feedback from their subordinates concerning the situation depicted in the scenario, we used a scale similar to that in Study 2. The scale we used was fitted to the scenario context and had five items. Supervisors indicated the extent to which they would (a) directly ask for their subordinates' opinion, (b) directly seek information about their performance from their subordinates, (c) go directly to their subordinates and ask for feedback, (d) directly ask their subordinates what they think about their performance as a leader and (e) not beat around the bush in asking for feedback ($\alpha = .94$).

Image-enhancement and ego-protective motives. To assess participants' motivation for their feedback-seeking behaviour, we asked what their reasons were for this behaviour. Image-enhancement motives were assessed using three items: "Employees would have a more positive

impression of me if they heard that I had received positive feedback from my subordinates", "Employees would perceive me as competent if they overheard the positive feedback I received from my subordinates", and "Employees would see me in a positive light if they overheard the positive feedback I received from my subordinates" ($\alpha = .94$; cf. Tuckey et al., 2002). Given that impression-enhancement is most effective if it reaches many individuals, and because receiving positive feedback probably has the strongest impact on the views of individuals who have not formed an impression yet (contrary to the feedback provider, whose opinion is expressed in the feedback), we decided to frame the image-enhancement items such that they referred to employees who overheard the positive feedback. Ego-protective motives were also assessed using three items: "I would have a more negative attitude toward myself if I received negative feedback from my subordinates", "My self-confidence would decrease if I received negative feedback from my subordinates", and "Asking for feedback would make me feel unsatisfied with myself" ($\alpha = .81$; cf. Park, Schmidt, Scheu, & DeShon, 2007; Tuckey et al., 2002).

Analyses and results

In all analyses of variance (ANOVAs), power (high/low) and uncertainty (high/low) were factors in the design. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are displayed in Table 1.³

Manipulation checks

As expected, the ANOVA on the power manipulation check revealed only a main effect of power, $F(1, 206) = 336.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .62$. Supervisors in the high-power condition ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.17$) felt more powerful than supervisors in the low-power condition ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.96$). The ANOVA on the uncertainty manipulation check revealed only a main effect of interpersonal uncertainty, $F(1, 206) = 189.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .48$. Supervisors in the high-uncertainty condition ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.31$) were more uncertain than supervisors in the low-uncertainty condition ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.96$). The manipulations were successful.

³To ensure that the study variables (direct feedback seeking, image-enhancement motives, ego-protective motives) were not only theoretically, but also empirically distinguishable, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood estimation. The CFA results of the three-factor model fit the data well, $\chi^2(41) = 78.99$, CFI = .98, NNFI = .97, RMSEA (90% CI) = .07 (.04 to .09). Moreover, factor loadings revealed that the items loaded highly (above .48) on their respective factors. Our hypothesized three-factor model provided a better fit to the data than any alternative model with fewer factors (e.g., the model with ego-defence and image-enhancement items loading on one factor and direct feedback seeking on a second factor). The best-fitting model of these alternatives, $\chi^2(43) = 373.56$, CFI = .83, NNFI = .79, RMSEA (90% CI) = .19 (.17 to .21), was significantly worse compared with the three-factor model, $\chi^2\Delta(1, 41) = 294.57$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis testing

We predicted that, particularly among high-power individuals, interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking (Hypothesis 1) through stronger ego-protective motives and weaker image-enhancement motives (Hypothesis 2).

Direct feedback seeking. The ANOVA on direct feedback seeking only revealed the expected interaction effect of power and interpersonal uncertainty, $F(1, 206) = 4.29$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Simple effects analysis revealed that only in the high-power condition were supervisors less likely to ask directly for feedback when they felt more uncertain ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.74$) than when they felt less uncertain ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 206) = 5.48$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, 95% CI $[-1.47, -0.13]$. In the low-power condition, direct feedback seeking did not vary as a function of uncertainty ($M_{\text{high uncertainty}} = 4.50$, $SD = 1.77$, $M_{\text{low uncertainty}} = 4.31$, $SD = 1.88$), $F(1, 206) = 0.23$, ns , $\eta_p^2 < .01$. Again, we found empirical support for Hypothesis 1.

Image-enhancement motives. The ANOVA on image-enhancement motives only revealed the expected interaction of power and interpersonal uncertainty, $F(1, 206) = 5.91$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Simple effects analysis revealed that only in the high-power condition were supervisors less motivated to enhance their image when they felt more uncertain ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.52$) than when they felt less uncertain ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.31$), $F(1, 206) = 4.26$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, 95% CI $[-1.19, -0.03]$. In the low-power condition, image-enhancement motives did not vary as a function of uncertainty ($M_{\text{high uncertainty}} = 5.28$, $SD = 1.59$, $M_{\text{low uncertainty}} = 4.89$, $SD = 1.48$), $F(1, 206) = 1.86$, ns , $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

Ego-protective motives. The ANOVA on ego-protective motives only revealed the expected interaction effect of power and interpersonal uncertainty, $F(1, 206) = 6.30$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Simple effects analysis revealed that only in the high-power condition were supervisors more motivated to protect their ego when they felt more uncertain ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.37$) than when they felt less uncertain ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 206) = 4.41$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, 95% CI $[0.04, 1.18]$. In the low-power condition, ego-protective motives did not vary as a function of uncertainty ($M_{\text{high uncertainty}} = 2.77$, $SD = 1.57$, $M_{\text{low uncertainty}} = 3.17$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 206) = 2.07$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

Conditional indirect effect testing. To test whether both image-enhancement and ego-protective motives mediated the interaction effect of interpersonal uncertainty and power on direct feedback seeking, we used a procedure recently suggested by Hayes (2012), which involves four different steps. In the first step, a regression analysis was conducted to test whether the interaction of power and uncertainty influenced the mediators (mediator models). In Step 2, a regression analysis was conducted in which

the dependent variable (direct feedback seeking) was separately regressed on the independent variable (interpersonal uncertainty), the moderator (power), their interaction, and the mediators (image-enhancement motives and ego-protective motives; dependent variable model). In Step 3, the conditional indirect effects of uncertainty via the mediators on the dependent variable at different levels of power were tested. In Step 4, the complete mediated moderation hypothesis was tested. In Steps 3 and 4, bootstrapping was used because the distribution of product terms is only asymptotically normal (Shrout & Bolger, 2002), and bootstrapping does not require assumptions about the sampling distribution. For each of the following models, 5000 bootstrap samples were used and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (BC CI95s; Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) were estimated.

As mentioned above, Step 1 revealed that the interaction term of power and uncertainty significantly influenced supervisors' motivation to enhance their image and to protect their ego. Step 2 showed that image-enhancement motives positively influenced direct feedback seeking, $b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$, and ego-protective motives negatively influenced direct feedback seeking, $b = -0.37$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). In Step 3, bootstrapping confirmed that interpersonal uncertainty, because it leads to lower motivation to enhance one's image, negatively affects direct feedback seeking in high-power supervisors (estimate: -0.21 ; BC CI95: -0.49 to -0.02), but not in low-power supervisors (estimate: 0.14 ; BC CI95: -0.06 to 0.39). In Step 3, bootstrapping also confirmed that interpersonal uncertainty, because it leads to higher motivation to protect one's ego, negatively affects direct feedback seeking in high-power supervisors (estimate: -0.22 ; BC CI95: -0.47 to -0.01), but not in low-power supervisors (estimate: 0.14 ; BC CI95: -0.06 to 0.38). In Step 4, bootstrapping confirmed that the Power $\times$ Interpersonal uncertainty interaction effect on direct feedback seeking was indeed mediated by image-enhancement motives (estimate: -0.35 ; BC CI95: -0.76 to -0.06) and ego-protective motives (estimate: -0.37 ; BC CI95: -0.73 to -0.08), which provides empirical support for Hypothesis 2.⁴

⁴We originally also assessed feedback seeking by means of monitoring (i.e., indirect feedback seeking) in our studies. However, we found no consistent effects of monitoring in our research. Therefore, and in order not to distract the reader from the focus of the research, our article focuses only on direct feedback seeking. However, to facilitate future meta-analyses, we decided to report the descriptive statistics and correlations of monitoring with other study variables. The means and standard deviations of monitoring were $M = 5.53$, $SD = 0.95$ in Study 1, $M = 6.06$, $SD = 0.89$ in Study 2, and $M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.02$ in Study 3. The correlation of monitoring with direct feedback seeking was .28 in Study 1, .29 in Study 2, and .17 in Study 3. The correlation of monitoring with power was .23 in Study 1 and .41 in Study 2. In Study 1, the correlation between monitoring and interpersonal uncertainty was $-.18$. In Study 3, the correlation between monitoring and ego-protective motives was $-.08$; between monitoring and image-enhancement motives it was .26.

TABLE 2
Regression results for the conditional indirect effects of Study 3 (Mediators: image-enhancement motives and ego-protective motives)

Mediator variable Model 1 (DV = image-enhancement motives)				
Predictor	b ^a	SE	t(210)	
Constant	5.06	0.10	49.42**	
Uncertainty	−0.11	0.20	−0.53	
Power	−0.04	0.20	−0.22	
Uncertainty × Power	−1.00	0.41	−2.43*	
Mediator variable Model 2 (DV = ego-protective motives)				
Predictor	b ^a	SE	t(210)	
Constant	2.97	0.10	29.46**	
Uncertainty	0.10	0.20	0.51	
Power	−0.01	0.20	−0.04	
Uncertainty × Power	1.01	0.40	2.51*	
Dependent variable model (DV = direct feedback seeking)				
Predictor	b ^a	SE	t(210)	
Constant	3.73	0.42	8.89**	
Image-enhancement motives	0.35	0.08	4.58**	
Ego-protective motives	−0.37	0.08	−4.68**	
Uncertainty	−0.23	0.22	−1.04	
Power	0.07	0.22	0.32	
Uncertainty × Power	−0.26	0.46	−0.57	
Conditional indirect effects via image-enhancement motives at high (+0.5) and low (−0.5) power				
Power W	(a ₁ + a ₃ W)b ₁	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot HL CI
High power	−0.21	0.12	−0.48	−0.02
Low power	0.14	0.11	−0.06	0.39
Conditional indirect effects via ego-protective motives at high (+0.5) and low (−0.5) power				
Power W	(a ₁ + a ₃ W)b ₁	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot HL CI
High power	−0.22	0.12	−0.47	−0.01
Low power	0.15	0.11	−0.06	0.39
Indirect effects of highest order interaction				
Mediator	a ₁ × b ₁	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot HL CI
Image-enhancement motives	−0.35	0.18	−0.76	−0.06
Ego-protective motives	−0.37	0.17	−0.73	−0.08

Results are presented per dependent variable. ^aUnstandardized regression coefficients. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Organizations are often faced with the problem that individuals do not seek the performance feedback they actually need in order to adapt to their environment and to improve their performance (Moss & Sanchez, 2004; Tourish & Robson, 2006). Our research findings show when and why individuals are less likely to seek feedback. Across three studies, our findings consistently indicated that, particularly among high-power

individuals, interpersonal uncertainty is negatively related to direct feedback seeking. Additionally, we found that an image-enhancement motive and an ego-protective motive explain this effect. Specifically, we found that only powerful individuals are less motivated to enhance their image and more motivated to protect their ego when they experience high (vs. low) levels of interpersonal uncertainty, which in turn prevents them from seeking performance feedback.

Theoretical implications and directions for future research

First, in the current study we respond to the recent call for research to explore when uncertainty does or does not lead to feedback seeking (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). In contrast to task- or performance-related uncertainty, which is generally considered to increase feedback seeking (for a review, see Ashford et al., 2003), our findings show that interpersonal uncertainty decreases feedback seeking. We argue and show that the negative link between interpersonal uncertainty and feedback seeking is due to the fact that interpersonal uncertainty affects individuals' self-related motives. Specifically, it strengthens ego-defence motives, which are known to decrease feedback seeking, and weakens image-enhancement motives, which are known to increase feedback seeking (see Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison & Bies, 1991, for reviews; Tuckey et al., 2002). Our results thus point to the importance of distinguishing between different forms of uncertainty.

Our findings also provide a compelling explanation for why some researchers have failed to find a positive effect of uncertainty on feedback seeking (Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Fedor et al., 1992). For instance, the uncertainty measure used by Fedor et al. (1992) contains items that tap into interpersonal aspects of uncertainty. One of the items used, "When my instructor pilot gives me feedback about my performance, his motives are not clear", seems to measure individuals' inability to interpret others' behaviour (i.e., interpersonal uncertainty) more than it measures task- or feedback-related uncertainty. When task and interpersonal uncertainty are not clearly disentangled, a blurred picture of the effects of uncertainty on feedback seeking may develop. We hope that our findings provide insights that will aid researchers in further clarifying the relationship between uncertainty and feedback seeking.

Second, our research highlights the important role of self-related motives in feedback seeking. Despite theoretical consensus that feedback-seeking motives mediate the effects of individual and situational determinants on feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford et al., 2003; VandeWalle, 2003), empirical investigations of potential mediators are extremely scarce (for an exception, see Tuckey et al., 2002). Our findings show that ego-defence and image-enhancement motives mediate the effects of more distal antecedents on feedback seeking. This provides important evidence that feedback seeking is not exclusively a product of task-related or instrumental motives (i.e., improving task performance), but is also significantly influenced by factors that are more closely related to individuals' self-concept: that is, their self-view and the image they wish to convey of themselves.

Third, given that power is omnipresent in organizations (Fairholm, 2009), it is surprising that the influence

of power was not investigated more systematically in prior research on feedback seeking in organizations. Our research findings suggest that power plays a crucial role in feedback-seeking processes. One reason is that factors that influence feedback seeking through individuals' ego- and image-related motives are particularly relevant to the powerful. This is of interest because, in addition to interpersonal uncertainty, several other factors have also been assumed to influence feedback seeking via image- and ego-related motives. For instance, it has been argued that lower performance expectations lead to less feedback seeking because of the motivation to protect one's ego (Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). Our results suggest that particularly powerful individuals will be less likely to seek feedback when they expect their performance to be lower, because feedback seeking would entail particularly strong ego-costs for them. Of course, future researchers may explore to what extent power also moderates the effects of other determinants on feedback seeking.

Important determinants of supervisory success are the supervisors' abilities to lead and motivate their employees. As a consequence, when supervisors are interested in understanding their own strengths and shortcomings, their own employees are probably the most important source of information. Therefore, contrary to most prior research (Callister et al., 1999; Fedor et al., 1992; Lee, Park, Lee, & Lee, 2007), our focus was on feedback seeking from a person lower in the hierarchy. The question arises whether our findings would generalize to feedback seeking from individuals who hold hierarchical positions at levels equal to or higher than the feedback seeker (e.g., supervisors asking other supervisors or superiors for feedback). Given that power differences can also exist between individuals working at the same hierarchical level, and that a person who holds a lower hierarchical position can also feel powerful, we expect power to exert similar effects. It might, of course, be harder for the feedback seeker to feel powerful if he or she is dealing with a feedback source in a higher hierarchical position. Moreover, hierarchical position not only affects the power relation between two parties, but it also affects other aspects of their relationship, which may also affect feedback-seeking behaviour (e.g., the code of conduct or the feedback seekers' and sources' responsibilities). Future research is necessary to explore in how far the hierarchical relationship does indeed affect feedback seeking.

Our work extends research on the link between uncertainty and feedback seeking by pointing to the influential role of interpersonal uncertainty, a relatively unexplored type of uncertainty. Given that we are among the first to explore the role of interpersonal uncertainty in the feedback context, a number of interesting issues arise. First, while we focused on interpersonal uncertainty as a state construct (i.e., interpersonal uncertainty that is transitory in nature, being dependent on a momentary situation), it

may well be that some individuals are in general more prone than others to experience interpersonal uncertainty. Although the effects of state and trait variables are often similar, previous researchers have pointed out that their effects occasionally differ (Chen & Mathieu, 2008; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Therefore, we believe that future research investigating the potential differential effects of trait versus state interpersonal uncertainty would be valuable. Second, because interpersonal uncertainty is a relatively new and unexplored concept, we considered it important to use different operationalizations. We therefore conceptualized interpersonal uncertainty as a state that may be measured by asking respondents about their feelings in recurrent situations with others (Study 1), as a state that may be primed by having participants describe critical incidents (Study 2), and as a state that may be manipulated in a scenario. All operationalizations used tapped into the key components of interpersonal uncertainty, which are the perceived inability to predict and explain one's own and others' behaviour. We consider these different operationalizations to be crucial for increasing confidence in the construct validity of this concept (Cook & Campbell, 1979; cf. De Cremer et al., 2010) and we encourage researchers to extend and test other operationalizations of this construct. Third, given that our findings showed that interpersonal uncertainty may have important consequences, future researchers may also wish to consider determinants of interpersonal uncertainty. The behaviour of the feedback provider is one factor that is likely to influence interpersonal uncertainty. Previous research has indicated, for instance, that an inaccessible feedback source or a poor relationship with the feedback source can impair feedback seeking (Vancouver & Morrison, 1995). Perhaps an increase in interpersonal uncertainty in the feedback receiver may explain this effect. Likewise, aspects of the general workplace environment, such as the feedback environment (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004), psychological safety climate (Edmondson, 1999), or employees' feedback orientations (Dahling, Chau, & O'Malley, 2012), may also affect the feedback seeker's interpersonal uncertainty.

Finally, the question arises whether our findings on feedback seeking can be translated to other interpersonally challenging interactions, such as providing feedback, speaking up in public, or voicing suggestions for change. Given that these behaviours are also influenced by ego- and image-related motives (Daly, Vangelisti, Neel, & Cavanaugh, 1989; Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea, & Frey, 2007), we assume that interpersonal uncertainty and power will affect these behaviours as well. Our research may thus help to provide an understanding of when and why powerful individuals are willing to approach such interpersonally challenging interactions, and, in doing so, may aid organizations in encouraging the powerful to engage in these behaviours.

Strengths and limitations

Naturally, each of the paradigms used has certain drawbacks. In Study 1, a cross-sectional field study, which is high in external validity, raises concerns with regard to causal inferences. However, because we replicated our findings in two experiments, we are able to provide causal evidence that interpersonal uncertainty and power indeed influence feedback seeking. Another potential caveat of Study 1 is that all concepts were assessed using the same questionnaire, thus raising concerns about common source/method variance. Because common source/method variance increases the main effects, it is likely to lead to an underestimation of interaction effect sizes (Evans, 1985; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Our hypotheses concerned the interactive effect of interpersonal uncertainty and power; therefore, common source/method variance is unlikely to challenge the validity of our findings.

Conversely, the experimental design (Study 2) and the scenario experiment (Study 3) might be criticized for a lack of generalizability. However, replication of our findings in the field study (Study 1) and the fact that our samples in Studies 2 and 3 comprised supervisors, who have work-experience and therefore, are much more likely than students to immerse themselves in the scenarios, reduces concerns with regard to external validity.

A potential limitation of our research is that we did not measure actual feedback-seeking behaviour, but used a self-report measure of feedback seeking (Study 1) and assessed individuals' intentions to seek feedback (Studies 2 and 3). Although behavioural intentions are powerful predictors of organizational behaviours (e.g., turnover intentions; for a meta-analysis see Steel & Ovalle, 1984), and although self-reports usually reliably reflect individuals' behaviour (Dhont, Van Hiel, De Bolle, & Roets, 2012; Wall et al., 2004), we regard our research as an initial but important step to learning about the relationship between social factors and feedback seeking.

Moreover, given that we maintained that task or role uncertainty would generate effects on feedback seeking that differed greatly from those of interpersonal uncertainty, it might have been valuable if we had also explicitly assessed or manipulated participants' task uncertainty. Including task uncertainty would have allowed us to directly compare the influence of task versus interpersonal uncertainty on feedback seeking and their concomitant influence on instrumental motives versus ego-protective and image-enhancement motives. However, previous theorizing and research already strongly point to the positive relationship between task uncertainty and feedback seeking and the mediating role of the instrumental motive (for a review, see Ashford et al., 2003). Nevertheless, we would welcome future research endeavours that include the moderating effect of type of uncertainty on feedback seeking and feedback-seeking motives.

Practical implications

Although conclusions regarding the practical implications of our research require further investigation, we see potential for our findings to be applied in organizational practice. In particular, organizations without formal feedback systems or organizations with a rigid hierarchical structure, where spontaneous upward feedback is limited, may benefit greatly from considering our findings.

Our results provide important evidence that particularly powerful individuals seek less performance feedback when they experience more interpersonal uncertainty. Consequently, organizations may benefit from taking measures to reduce interpersonal uncertainty in powerful individuals. If uncertainty is due to internal states, interpersonal competence training courses, designed to improve confidence and skills in interpersonal interactions, may be an efficient way to reduce uncertainty and increase feedback seeking. If interpersonal uncertainty is due to external circumstances, such as being unfamiliar with the prevailing norms and practices in a new organization or department, organizations might consider falling back on formal feedback systems for the short term in order to assist individuals in becoming acquainted with the practices of their new environment. This may strengthen their certainty and, thus, their willingness to seek feedback.

Our findings also highlight that relatively weak image-enhancement and strong ego-protective motives underlie powerful individuals' reduced willingness to seek feedback when they experience high interpersonal uncertainty. Organizations may thus benefit from taking steps to increase individuals' image-enhancement motives with regard to feedback seeking, for instance, by creating strong feedback-seeking norms, and to decrease their ego-protective motives by establishing an organizational culture that emphasizes and rewards individuals' strengths. Indeed, the self-affirmation literature indicates that boosting a person's ego is an effective intervention that allows individuals to open up to feedback and performance evaluations (McQueen & Klein, 2006; Sedikides & Alicke, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Even though performance feedback offers valuable opportunities to increase insights into one's strengths and weaknesses and to improve performance (Atwater, Roush, & Fischthal, 1995), individuals often do not seek enough feedback (Tourish & Robson, 2003). Our findings provide important information about when and why individuals are less likely to ask for feedback. Interpersonal uncertainty is negatively linked to feedback seeking in powerful individuals. Additionally, we show that ego-protective and image-enhancement motives mediate this effect. Powerful individuals

experience stronger ego-protective and weaker image-enhancement motives when they are uncertain in interpersonal situations, compared with when they are certain, which in turn makes them less likely to seek performance feedback. Reducing interpersonal uncertainty and dealing with individuals' motives that underlie feedback seeking may prove effective for promoting feedback seeking in organizations.

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