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Input

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Abstract: Asking for feedback is a popular way to solicit third-party input at work. However, feedback seeking is only weakly related to performance, and employees often report that the feedback that they receive is unhelpful. Addressing this discrepancy, across six studies ($N=2,014$), we illuminate a suboptimal feedback-seeking-and-giving process, in which requesters' typical input-seeking strategies hinder providers from delivering the type of input that requesters desire. Across two studies, we find that most input seekers desire developmental (i.e. critical and actionable) comments to improve their performance, and most often seek out this information by asking for "feedback." Yet, a request for "feedback" limits the criticality and actionability of providers' insight because it fails to increase their future orientation. Critically, we observe a simple yet powerful alternative: feedback seekers can ask for "advice" instead. Across four studies, including a field experiment, we find that input is more developmental (more critical and actionable) when providers are asked to give advice (versus feedback)—due to a greater future focus. Together, these data suggest that framing an input request as advice seeking is a promising way to better align feedback-seekers' information-seeking strategies with their communication goals.

Key words: feedback; advice; performance; personal development; future focus

(12,081 words)

1. Introduction

Feedback, or externally-generated input on an employee's performance, is an essential means by which employees learn, develop, and advance their careers (Edmondson, 1999; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1997; Patel, Evans, & Saiman, 2013). Employees recognize the benefits of feedback, and often proactively seek performance input from others (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Gong, Wang, Huang, & Cheung, 2017). Despite the possible benefits, employees often express dissatisfaction with the input they receive from their colleagues (Mishra & Farooqi, 2013; Wigert & Harter, 2017). In a recent Gallup report, only 26% of employees strongly agreed that the feedback they receive helps them do their work better (Wigert & Harter, 2017). Similarly, a review of feedback-seeking behavior revealed only a weak relationship between feedback seeking and performance (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sacket, 2015). Why might soliciting feedback fail to offer useful insights for employees?

We propose a novel reason why seeking "feedback" often fails to yield the type of information that feedback seekers desire: how people ask for this information leads prospective input providers to generate information that is inconsistent with the seeker's goals. In this paper, we build on research delineating various motivations for seeking feedback (Anseel et al., 2015; Anseel, Lievens, & Levy, 2007; Ashford, De Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016) and investigate feedback seekers' most commonly endorsed goals. We then consider how people seeking developmental input to improve their performance frame their requests, and propose that people are most likely to seek this information by asking for "feedback." Yet we posit that receiving a request for "feedback" thwarts would-be feedback providers from adopting the future-focused mindset that best enables them to generate constructive, actionable insights. Additionally, we propose a means by which those seeking developmental input can better align their improvement goals with their information-seeking strategy: by asking for "advice" instead of "feedback."

Our research contributes to research on feedback, organizational information exchange and learning and development in four primary ways. First, we provide unique insight into feedback

processes by investigating both sides of the exchange, and their influence on one another. This approach enables us to highlight a suboptimal feedback-seeking-and-giving process, whereby requesters' typical feedback-seeking strategies prompt input providers to adopt a mindset that reduces their likelihood of delivering the type of input requesters desire. Second, our investigation illuminates the feedback phenomenon at the level of an individual request. This contrasts with the majority of prior feedback research, which centers on aggregate, scale-based measures of general feedback-seeking and giving behaviors (including actions ranging from “paying attention to how your boss acts toward you” to “seeking information from your coworkers about your work performance,” Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986). By examining specific feedback requests and their informational consequences, our research provides a more nuanced understanding of the trajectory of these individual exchanges, better illuminating how feedback seeking may fail to meet its potential.

This work also identifies a novel psychological state that impacts the nature of the input providers deliver: their focus on the future. Whereas prior research has largely considered how static input provider traits influence the information they share (e.g., De Kraker-Pauw, Van Wesel, Krabbendam, & Van Atteveldt, 2017; Dibble, 2018; Finkelstein, Fishbach, & Tu, 2017), our research highlights that feedback content is also influenced by changes in an input provider's psychological state, even changes subtle enough to be influenced by being asked for “advice” rather than “feedback.” Finally, this paper contributes to research on developmental interactions more broadly by providing a comparison of the two primary means of soliciting third-party insights: asking for feedback and asking for advice. Our work illustrates that these two input-seeking methods—which have seldom been simultaneously considered—can generate significantly different responses. From a practical perspective, our research provides a simple yet powerful intervention for feedback seekers interested in constructive comments: reframing the default request for “feedback” by asking for “advice” instead.

2. Background and Hypotheses

To develop our dual-role predictions for feedback interactions, we integrate prior work examining why employees are motivated to seek out feedback and their methods of doing so with research on the content characteristics that make feedback valuable. First, we derive predictions for feedback seekers' desired content and their likely approach to obtaining it. Then, we theorize about the input providers' perspective, considering how the method by which third-party information is solicited might influence the nature of the input that providers deliver.

2.1. Feedback Seeking Tactics and Motivations

Feedback seeking is often conceptualized as “the conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states” (Ashford, 1986, p. 466). Prior research has highlighted two distinct ways that people obtain feedback, by: directly asking for it (a tactic termed “inquiry”) and indirectly monitoring environmental cues for relevant information (termed “monitoring”) (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ashford et al., 2016, Anseel et al., 2015). Research on how people seek feedback has largely compared these two tactics, focusing on why people engage in feedback inquiry and/or monitoring (Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999; Gupta, Govindarajan & Malhotra, 1999; Morrison, 1993). This work conceptualizes each strategy as a broad body of related behaviors, often measuring “inquiry” and “monitoring” behaviors using multi-item scales that cover a variety of specific strategies (Anseel et al., 2015; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992). In this paper, we consider the consequences of different feedback-seeking behaviors within the *same* tactic, proactive inquiry. Our investigation focuses on “inquiry” tactics as they have been theorized to yield more useful performance-relevant information (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). For example, feedback seekers have more control over the information that they receive when they directly request it. In contrast, the success of monitoring tactics depends on uncontrollable situational factors, such as the potential for people to overhear their colleagues' conversations (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992). As a result,

we consider how feedback seekers' framing of direct requests influences the type of information that seekers receive in response.

The feedback-seeking tactics that employees use are influenced by their motives. A significant body of work conceptualizes the decision to seek feedback as a cost-benefit analysis, with employees weighing the value of attaining information to meet their goals with the potential ego- and image-related costs of seeking feedback (Hays & Williams, 2011; Morrison & Vancouver, 2000; Park, Schmidt, Scheu, & DeShon, 2007; Sherf & Morrison, 2020). Recent feedback-seeking research has disaggregated the "benefit" side of this equation, positing four potential motivations that drive feedback seeking (Anseel, Lievens, & Levy, 2007; Ashford et al. 2003, 2016). First, people seek feedback to improve their performance (self-improvement) (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Evidence supports this motivation; people are more likely to seek feedback when they believe it will highlight what they can improve (Morrison & Cummings, 1992) or when they have a learning goal orientation (Anseel et al., 2015; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Second, people seek feedback to make a positive impression on others (self-enhancement) (Morrison & Bies, 1991). In prior work, people sought more feedback when they wanted to appear competent to their colleagues (Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002), as well as when the situation provided for a greater ability to manage impressions (Ashford & Northcraft; 1992). Employees also seek feedback for two other reasons, to better understand their level of performance (self-assessment) and to gain external input that verifies their own assessment of themselves (self-verification) (Swann et al., 2003), although these latter two potential motives have received less empirical attention (Ashford et al., 2016).

Whereas feedback seekers' requests may be driven by more than one of these motivations, among those who seek feedback via direct inquiry, research suggests that self-improvement motives often dominate. Numerous studies across diverse samples, ranging from Australian managers to medical residents, have illuminated a positive link between feedback seekers' learning goals and their propensity to seek feedback through inquiry (Parker & Collins, 2010; Teunissen et al.; 2009

Cho, 2013). In contrast, those with self-enhancement motives tend to seek feedback through indirect monitoring which can enable them to protect their image (Parker & Collins, 2010; Teunissen et al., 2009).

Additional work that does not directly examine feedback-seekers' motives also suggests a general preference for improvement-oriented information among feedback recipients. For example, when given a choice, people elect to receive information that could enhance their performance over that which could boost their egos (Park, Schmidt, Scheu, & DeShon, 2007; Staple & Tesser, 2001).

Beyond this empirical work, direct inquiry seems the most straightforward – and in some cases, the only possible – means of accessing critical information providing for one's development. People may be able to gain an understanding of their relative performance, or the extent to which they are viewed positively via monitoring strategies (such as attending to the feedback given to peers, or how peers and supervisors act towards oneself, Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992). However, gaining insight into how one could improve his or her *own* performance would be much more difficult to obtain through these less direct methods. This information asymmetry across feedback-seeking tactics should strengthen the link between direct feedback seeking and an improvement motivation. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

***Hypothesis 1:** People who directly seek feedback from others will be more motivated by self-improvement than by self-enhancement, self-assessment, or self-verification.*

2.2 Desired Feedback Content

If those directly seeking feedback hope to receive information that helps them improve, they are likely to desire feedback content that would best enable them to do so. Feedback research has distinguished between two primary categories of feedback content: evaluative and developmental (Boswell & Boudreau, 2002; Geister, Konradt, & Hertel, 2006). Evaluative feedback—also commonly referred to as the knowledge of results (Annett, 1969), outcome feedback (Earley, Northcraft, & Lituchy, 1990), or summative feedback (Chan & Lam, 2010)—focuses on appraising

the quality of one's overall performance. This type of feedback offers recipients information on whether or not their current level of performance is satisfactory, often as compared with one's peers (Lam, DeRue, Karam, & Hollenbeck, 2011) or a predetermined performance goal (Butler, Karpicke, & Roediger III, 2007).

In contrast, developmental feedback (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011; Zhou, 2003)—sometimes referred to as process feedback (Earley et al. 1990), diagnostic feedback (Park et al. 2007), or formative feedback (Taras, 2005)—focuses on illuminating strategies to improve one's performance. Defined as “helpful or valuable information that enables the employees to learn, develop, and make improvements on the job,” (Zhou, 2003, p.415) developmental feedback “provide[s] employees with behaviorally relevant information that might lead to the improvement of their performance in the future...” (Zhou, 2003, p.415). Li et al., (2011) identified two defining characteristics that differentiate developmental feedback from evaluative feedback. In contrast to evaluative feedback, developmental feedback “(a) provides helpful and useful (i.e. quality) information from others and (b) it is future oriented.” (p. 2). Although scant research has directly compared the effects of evaluative and developmental feedback, a qualitative case study of a public sector performance appraisal system (based on evaluative feedback) suggested that evaluative feedback may be suboptimal for generating performance improvement due to its failure to generate forward-looking insights (Longenecker & Nykodym, 1996, see also Korsgaard & Diddams, 1996). These initial findings suggest that developmental feedback may be especially valuable for employees who wish to improve their performance.

For those seeking to improve their performance, prior research identifies two characteristics of developmental feedback that could make it particularly valuable. First, developmental feedback best achieves its purpose when it highlights and emphasizes the areas in which the recipient can improve (Bond & Anderson, 1987; Fishbach, Eyal, & Finkelstein, 2010; Park et al. 2007). That is, feedback will be more helpful for the recipient's development when it has a critical emphasis, which

enables recipients to most effectively direct their efforts (Ilgen, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1981; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Second, developmental feedback is most valuable when it provides clear guidelines and specific strategies for recipients to improve (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Goodman et al., 2004; Kopelman, 1986; Park et al., 2007). In other words, developmental feedback is most useful when it is actionable, containing suggestions of what the recipient should or should not do in the future.

Despite its value, developmental feedback is likely more difficult to attain than evaluative feedback. Not only is evaluative feedback more readily available in the workplace, but employees often receive this information without having to proactively seek it, for example, via scorecards or formal review processes. These established processes, however, are typically less capable of providing the individual, action-oriented insights employees desire to improve (Longenecker & Nykodym, 1996). Moreover, widespread reports of discontent with the feedback that employees receive suggests the possibility of chronic under-delivery of developmental, critical, and actionable insights (Wigert & Harter, 2017; Zenger & Folkman, 2014).

Although prior work has noted that different types of feedback can serve different purposes, little work has investigated which type of feedback that seekers most often desire, or whether they successfully elicit it. Although we are aware of no prior research specifically assessing the nature of the feedback content input seekers hope to attain, building on prior research and following from H1, we propose:

***Hypothesis 2:** People who directly seek feedback from others will desire input that is more developmental (i.e. critical and actionable) than what they receive.*

2.3. Input Request Framing and Providers' Generation of Developmental Insights

Prior research offers rich insights into when and why people directly seek third-party input on one's performance (i.e. feedback). However, no research has illuminated the specific ways people communicate inquiries for this input, or how different request methods affect the type of input that

people receive. Following from research connecting the framing of a question with the characteristics of the responses it generates (Huang, Yeomans, Brooks, Minson, & Gino, 2017; Kluger & Malloy, 2019; Swann, Guilano, & Wegner, 1982; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2006), we suggest that the framing of feedback inquiries may be consequential in determining the nature of the input that colleagues provide.

First, we consider how feedback seekers may frame their requests. Those seeking information could gain insight into their performance using a variety of inquiry-focused terms: they could reference their past performance by asking for their colleague's feedback or review, reference the future by asking for advice, suggestions, recommendations, or proposals, or make a neutral request, asking for their colleague's thoughts, input, opinions, ideas, or views. We propose that, among these alternatives, colleagues will likely anchor on the language that—over time—has been most frequently associated with the provision of performance-improving insights: asking for “feedback” (for a discussion of the historical use of the word “feedback” see Merriam-Webster, 2020). “Feedback” is such a commonly used term to describe improvement-oriented input that an entire industry—the “Employee Feedback” market—has been built to facilitate the transfer of this information (Feffer, 2019; Marketwatch, 2020). Given the ubiquity of the word “feedback” to describe this category of insights, and evidence that anchoring not only has a strong effect on people's decision-making (Johnson & Schkade, 1989; Wilson, Houston, Etling, & Brekke, 1996; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), but also on their language use (Bahnik, English, & Strack, 2017; Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Keysar & Barr, 2002), we propose:

***Hypothesis 3:** People who seek developmental input most often use the phrase “feedback” to frame their request.*

Although we propose that people will most often ask for “feedback” when seeking constructive input to improve their performance, we do not suggest that this way of framing the request is most likely to generate the types of insights feedback seekers desire. We have previously

theorized that direct feedback seekers most commonly desire information about what they could do better (i.e. that is critical), accompanied by clear guidelines for how to improve (i.e. that is actionable). Both of these sources of information primarily focus on the recipient's future actions. Although insight into what one could do better, in part, references past performance, the core provision of "what could be improved" is centered on the future. Similarly, for a comment to be actionable, it must address recipients' future actions; recipients can no longer do anything about what has happened in the past (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011; DeNisi & Smith, 2014; Shute, 2008).

Moving our discussion to the provider side of the interaction, we now consider how seekers' request framing may influence providers' potential to deliver developmental, critical, and actionable comments. People's mindsets can significantly affect the content and nature of their communications (Semin, Higgins, de Montes, Estourget, & Valencia, 2005; Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2010; Venus, Johnson, Zhang, Wang, & Lanaj, 2019). Research in this domain demonstrates that those with a future orientation generate more future-focused language (Park et al., 2017), for example by making more statements about the future in their daily life (Brianza & Demiray, 2019). Accordingly, we suggest that because recipients' desired content focuses on the future, providers will be best positioned to generate input focused on future actions when they have a future-oriented mindset. We propose such a future orientation can be achieved when a provider is asked for "advice."

In the scholarly literature, advice has been defined as "a recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct" (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006, p. 143). Researchers have often studied advice in the context of making decisions (e.g. Blunden et al. 2019; Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012; Yaniv, 2004). However, the colloquial use of the term "advice" may also pertain to inquiries intended to improve one's work performance (Cross et al., 2001). When we surveyed 150 employees about their most recent experience of giving advice at work, the greatest proportion of respondents (44.0%) reported providing information to help improve the recipient's performance (versus 25.3% to help improve decision making, 14.0% to help improve a relationship, 3.3% to make a positive

impression, and 13.3% another reason, such as improve the recipient's finances or health; see supplementary materials Study A). These results suggest that asking for "advice" can be a viable alternative to asking for "feedback" to gain third-party input to improve one's performance.

We believe that framing the request as "advice" is likely to be more effective at generating developmental input because the future orientation of advice will imbue the provider with a more future-focused mindset, which is a highly malleable psychological state (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). Although, as we have noted, colleagues do occasionally share developmental feedback outside of an evaluative context, most prototypical "feedback" provision situations are paired with an evaluation of how well the recipient has performed. At work, feedback provision commonly occurs during annual or quarterly review sessions along with assessments for awards and promotions (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006). Similarly, at school, feedback is often provided in the context of receiving grades (Taras, 2005). As a result of most prototypical feedback provision happening within an evaluative setting, when seekers request "feedback," input providers will likely focus on the seeker's past (versus future) performance. Scholars have documented a past bias in feedback delivery (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Boswell & Boudreau, 2002). Past focus can constrain thinking about alternative possibilities (Arkes & Blumer, 1985; Linsey, Tseng, Fu, Cagan, Wood, & Schunn, 2010; Youmans & Arciszewski, 2014) such as by limiting the range of ideas considered while brainstorming (Jansson & Smith, 1991). As a result, past focus is likely to prompt input providers to adopt a more fixed understanding of the key objectives of the task and how to achieve them. This fixed understanding could prevent input providers from sharing input that generates novel, actionable strategies to optimize the seeker's future performance (Zhang, Gino, & Margolis, 2018).

In contrast, prototypical advice provision does not typically happen in an evaluative setting (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). Moreover, advice provision emphasizes thinking about possible future actions as opposed to evaluating past actions (e.g. Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015; Levari &

Gilbert, 2018). For instance, in one study, advice givers commented more often on what the recipients *should do* than what they *did do* (Levari & Gilbert, 2018). Such openness to possibility may expand providers' openness to considering a range of future possibilities for the seeker.

Accordingly, we propose:

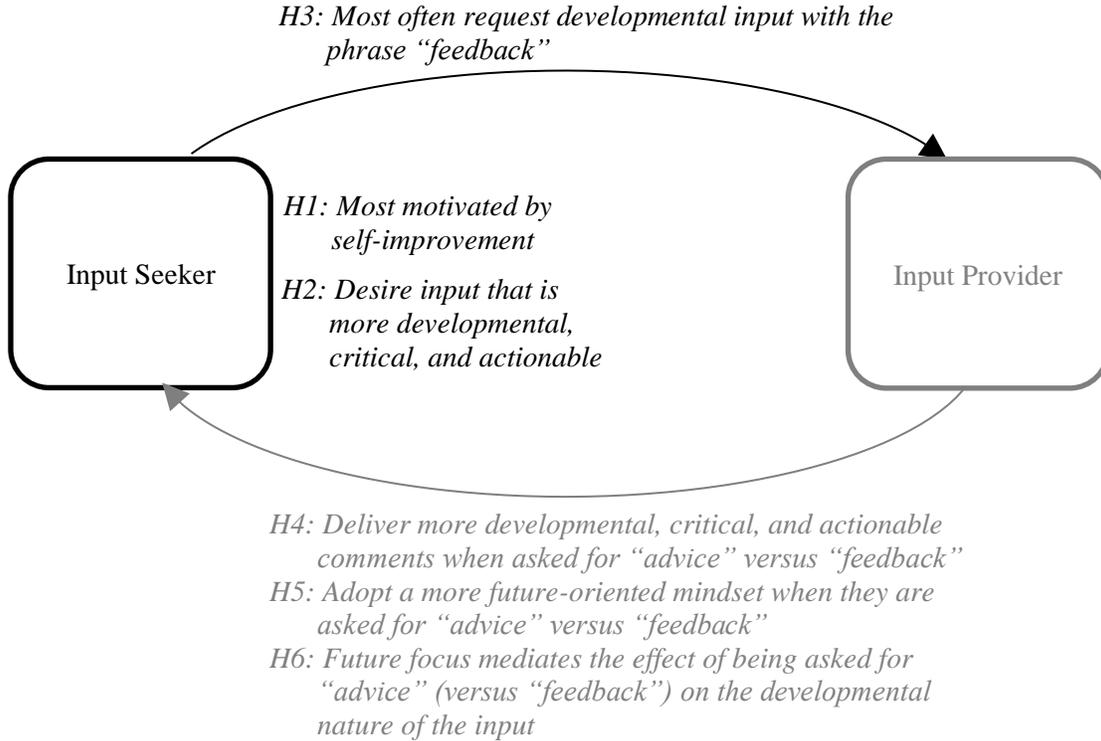
Hypothesis 4: *Input providers will deliver more developmental, critical, and actionable comments when they are asked for “advice” compared to when they are asked for “feedback.”*

Hypothesis 5: *Input providers will adopt a more future-oriented mindset when they are asked for “advice” compared to when they are asked for “feedback.”*

Hypothesis 6: *An input provider's future focus will mediate the effect of being asked for “advice” (versus “feedback”) on the developmental nature of the input they provide.*

We summarize our hypotheses of the input feedback-seeking-and-giving interaction process in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Summary of Hypothesized Input-Seeking-and-Giving Process.



3. Research Overview

We test our hypotheses of the input-seeking-and-giving interaction process across six studies. First, we evaluate the seeker’s point of view, examining in Study 1 ($N = 199$) our predictions that seekers desire more developmental feedback content than they tend to receive and in Study 2 ($N = 199$) that they often request this content by seeking “feedback.” Then, we investigate the input provider side of the interaction across a diverse range of contexts, samples, and activities, examining our hypotheses that soliciting “feedback” leads providers to offer less developmental, critical, and actionable content compared to an underused alternative: asking for “advice.” In Study 3A ($N = 612$), we evaluate the content of feedback providers’ input when asked for “feedback,” “advice,” or a neutral alternative, “thoughts.” Study 3A examines our hypothesized mechanism: the provider’s future focus. In Study 3B ($N = 194$) we test the benefits of soliciting advice (versus feedback) across a variety of real-world situations involving actual work colleagues. In Study 3C ($N = 501$) we

evaluate the effect of “advice” versus “feedback” requests directly from the recipient, and provide a second direct test of our hypothesized mechanism: future focus. In Study 4 ($N = 309$), we test our hypothesis with a field experiment in an educational setting. The data, analysis code, and stimuli for all studies are available through the Open Science Framework

(https://osf.io/v3c4k/?view_only=a281d4e32761446e911a1764b5f26019).

4. Study 1: Feedback Seekers Want More Developmental, Critical, and Actionable Input

Study 1 examines the type of input employees seek when directly asking their colleagues for feedback. In Study 1, we examined the underlying goals of employees who recently sought feedback. Given findings showing the link between learning goals and seeking feedback through direct inquiry (Parker & Collins, 2010; Teunissen et al., 2009; Cho, 2013), and the greater potential for individuals to uncover useful insights through direct inquiry, we predicted that employees would rate self-improvement as their strongest motivation for seeking feedback.

4.1 Participants and Procedure

We recruited 199 adults located in the U.S. who work at least 21 hours a week (41.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 29.8$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.1$) through Prolific Academic, a platform to connect researchers with a pre-screened participant pool (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisiti, 2017). Participants described the most recent time that they had asked a colleague to give them feedback about a task they had completed. To facilitate the vivid re-experience of this event, we used the event reconstruction method (Grube, Schroer, Hentzschel, and Hertel, 2008). Specifically, to increase immersion, participants described the feedback provider, the task, and what they hoped to achieve through open-ended response questions.

Next, employees completed measures of their feedback-seeking motives and desired content, in randomized order (there were no effects of order). Participants indicated the relative importance that they placed on each of the four feedback-seeking motives identified by prior research (self-improvement, self-assessment, self-verification, and self-enhancement; Anseel et al., 2007; Ashford

et al., 2016) during the interaction they described. Participants did this by allocating a total of one hundred points across the following four motives (Doyle, Green, & Bottomley, 1997): “improve my performance on the task” (self-improvement), “confirm that the way the giver viewed my performance was consistent with how I viewed it” (self-verification), “learn how well I performed on the task” (self-assessment), and “make a positive impression on other people, such as the giver” (impression management).

Employees also indicated the type of feedback content they desired. To construct this measure, we conducted a pilot study (supplementary materials Study B) which revealed three primary content categories: suggestions (that identify what the recipient should and/or should not do in the future), criticism (that identifies things the recipient did not do well), and praise (that identifies what the recipient did well). Following this categorization, participants rated how much they would have liked their feedback to focus more on offering suggestions, criticism, and praise as compared to how much it actually did. We used this relative measure because employee memories of what they desired but did not receive are likely to be stronger and thus more accurate (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Participants indicated their agreement to three statements that began with “I think the giver’s feedback would have been most helpful for me if it focused much more on” and were followed by “providing suggestions of what I should / shouldn’t do in the future,” (suggestions) “highlighting the things I could improve on” (criticism), and “highlighting the things I did well,” (praise), respectively, on scales ranging from -3 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +3 (*Strongly Agree*).

4.2 Results and Discussion

In line with H1, a repeated measures ANOVA revealed differences across feedback-seeking goals ($F(3,198) = 59.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$). Participants allocated significantly more points to the self-improvement goal ($M = 38.57, SD = 20.67$) than the self-verification goal ($M = 25.85, SD = 16.86, F(1,198) = 30.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$), the self-assessment goal ($M = 22.42, SD = 14.72,$

$F(1,198) = 57.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$), or the impression management goal ($M = 13.17, SD = 13.60, F(1, 198) = 147.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .43$). Similarly, when we assessed participants' "primary goal" as the goal to which they allocated the most points¹, we found that a majority of feedback seekers (55.3%) indicated that the primary goal of their feedback seeking was to improve their performance, which was significantly higher than those whose primary goal was to confirm that the giver's evaluation of their performance matched their own (self-verification, 25.1%), understand their performance (self-assessment, 20.1%), or make a positive impression on other people (impression management, 11.6%) (all $p < .001$ versus performance improvement). In fact, only four out of the 199 participants (2.0%) did *not* allocate any points to a self-improvement goal.

Next, we compared the average seeker's desire for more suggestions, criticism, and praise. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant differences in seekers' desired content ($F(2,198) = 13.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). In line with H2, feedback seekers more strongly desired both suggestions ($M_{suggestion} = 1.77, SD_{suggestion} = 1.31, F(1, 198) = 16.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$) and criticism ($M_{criticism} = 1.76, SD_{criticism} = 1.19, F(1, 198) = 17.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$) than praise ($M_{praise} = 1.26, SD_{praise} = 1.37$). Feedback seekers' desire for suggestions and criticism did not significantly differ ($F(1, 198) = .02, p = .904, \eta^2 < .01$).

Study 1 offers evidence that when directly seeking feedback, people are most often looking to improve their performance, rather than to assess their performance, verify that others' evaluations of them align with their self-views, or make a positive impression on others. Relatedly, most direct feedback seekers in this study wanted their feedback to focus more on highlighting what they could have done to improve and provide suggestions for what they should do in the future, as opposed to

¹ For the 8.5% of participants with a top point allocation that was equal between two or more goals, we counted each of these goals as "primary." For this reason, these percentages do not sum to 100. When we exclude those with a tied top point allocation, our results are similar (top goal: 52.7% self-improvement, 20.9% self-verification, 17.6% self-assessment, 8.8% impression management).

highlighting what they did well. That is, Study 1 provides evidence that feedback seekers desire more critical and actionable input than they receive.

5. Study 2: People Ask for Feedback When Directly Seeking Developmental Input

Whereas Study 1 offers preliminary evidence that feedback seekers most often desire developmental input, it does not directly examine how people who desire developmental input frame their requests. In Study 2 we investigated the language that seekers use when asking for other people's input to improve their performance. Because it is often difficult for people to recall the exact words that they use to ask for developmental input (Poppenk, Walia, McIntosh, Joannis, Klein, & Köhler, 2008), we assessed people's input-seeking language in Study 2 in response to a realistic workplace scenario. This study was preregistered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=u3p7by>).

5.1 Participants and Procedure

We recruited 199 adults who worked as a paid employee under a supervisor for at least 21 hours a week through Prolific Academic (46.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 31.9$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.2$). Employees imagined that their supervisor had assigned them to draft a proposal for an important project that their department would lead in the following year, and were about to submit the draft of their proposal. They were asked to “imagine that you would like to ask your supervisor's thoughts on their proposal to make the proposal better” and given a text box to draft an email making this request. Because in a pretest, participants did not seem to clearly understand the task instructions, we added the following note: “For example, you can ask for your supervisor's advice, feedback, or opinion.” We counterbalanced the order of the words “advice” and “feedback” in this prompt; there were no order effects. We coded each email for whether it contained the word “feedback” or “advice” using the “grepl” function in R. If a single email referred to the input as both “feedback” or “advice,” we coded the email as both containing “feedback” and “advice.”

5.2 Results and Discussion

When requesting input from their supervisor to improve their work, the largest proportion of employees used the word “feedback” (48.7%), providing support for H3. In contrast, a small minority of employees used the word “advice” (9.0%) (McNemar test $X^2(1, N = 199) = 57.41, p < .001$). Apart from “advice” and “feedback,” participants also frequently used the words thoughts (17.6%), opinion (9.5%), suggestions (9.0%), input (8.5%), and comments (3.5%) to describe the input that they were seeking. Although prior literature has referred to improvement-oriented information as “developmental feedback,” (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011; Zhou, 2003) no participant used the phrase “developmental feedback” in this study.

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 suggest that when soliciting developmental input, people often frame their request as “feedback” seeking. When people ask for “feedback,” they often want the input that they receive to focus on what they can improve in the future and provide suggestions for how to do so. In contrast, seekers of developmental input seldom use the word “advice,” despite its potential to better elicit their desired content from the input provider.

6. Studies 3A-4: Input Providers Offer More Developmental Content When Asked for Advice (vs. Feedback)

Studies 1 and 2 revealed that seekers soliciting developmental input often frame their request as “feedback” (and seldom frame it as seeking “advice”). In Studies 3A-4 we turned to the provider perspective. Across four studies, we examined whether asking for “feedback” led providers to offer less developmental (critical and actionable) content as compared to an underutilized alternative, asking for “advice.”

6.1 Common Methodological Approach

All four studies followed the same basic structure: participants were asked to provide feedback or advice about someone’s task performance. We then assessed the characteristics of each comment using a method adapted from Milkman, Rogers, and Bazerman (2009) and an analytic approach proposed by Biesanz and Human (2010), described below.

To rate each set of comments, we recruited independent online coders who were blind to our study hypotheses through online panels, such as Prolific Academic (Studies 3A and 3C) and Amazon Mechanical Turk (Studies 3B and 4), that offer access to more diverse samples than more traditional university participant pools (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). First, coders clicked through a series of training pages where they reviewed five random comments. Then, coders rated 5-10 randomly chosen comments on our dimensions of interest, described below (these coding materials are included on our Open Science Framework page:

https://osf.io/v3c4k/?view_only=a281d4e32761446e911a1764b5f26019). These ratings served as our dependent variables. For each study, we aimed to recruit at least five coders per comment.²

6.2 Dependent Variables

Developmental Nature. We first defined the developmental and evaluative nature of a comment for the raters: “A comment is developmental when it focuses on developing specific strategies to improve someone's level of performance. A comment is evaluative when it focuses primarily on appraising whether or not someone's level of performance is satisfactory.” Raters then rated the developmental (versus evaluative) nature of each comment, indicating its predominant tone by responding to the question “Do you think this comment is more evaluative or developmental?” with a five-point Likert scale ranging from -2 (Mostly Evaluative) to +2 (Mostly Developmental).

Criticality. As a measure of criticality, raters counted how many of the unique points described “what the recipient did not do well” (# critical points) and “what the recipient did well” (# praising points). Following prior research illustrating that people are more responsive to the overall tone of a message rather than its specific content (Mehrabian & Weiner, 1967), we operationalized criticality as a proportion of critical and praising points. Specifically, we calculated a *criticality ratio*

² See supplementary materials for a table of the means, standard deviations, and coder reliability for each comment characteristic by study.

for each comment using the proportion of criticisms (i.e. # critical points / (# critical points + # praising points)). We expected that the *relative* critical focus of a comment would more strongly predict its developmental nature (i.e. focus on improving the recipient's performance) than its length or the absolute number of critical points made. We directly tested this idea in Study 3A by examining whether the number of unique points, number of critical points, number of praising points, or the criticality ratio best predicted the developmental nature of a comment (see Figure 2 on page 25).

Actionability. As a measure of actionability, raters counted how many of the unique points were dedicated to “making suggestions on what the recipient should do” (# suggestions). We also assessed perceived input actionability using a three-item actionability scale. Using a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*), raters indicated their agreement with three statements that began with “Compared to the average comment the current comment...” followed by “is clearer on what actions the recipient should take to improve his/her performance”, “provides highly actionable suggestions,” and “gives [the rater] a better idea of what actions the recipient should take if he/she were to perform the task again.” We created a composite measure of perceived actionability by taking the average of the three ratings (Cronbach's alphas reported in the results section for each individual study; all were above .90).

Usefulness. For each comment, raters completed a three-item scale assessing the usefulness of each comment. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the statement “Compared to the average comment, the comment is more...” “constructive,” “useful,” and “helpful,” using a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). We averaged these three items to create a composite usefulness score (Cronbach's alphas reported in the results section for each individual study; all were above .90).

6.3 Analysis Strategy

Following Biesanz and Human (2010), we treated each rating as an observation made by an independent subject and used a hierarchical linear model (HLM) to analyze the effects of advice

versus feedback-provision on comment characteristics (i.e. developmental nature, criticality, number of suggestions, actionability, and usefulness). We estimated each comment characteristic in a hierarchical linear model with a dummy variable for the advice condition as our independent variable and a random intercept term to account for natural variance across raters (Moneta et al. 2010). Thus, across our studies, we report the marginal estimated means and standard errors.

7. Study 3A: Providing Advice vs. Feedback vs. Thoughts for a Job Application Letter

In Study 3A (preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=qu73j5>), we compared how the content of input providers’ comments varied when a request for developmental input was framed as a request for “advice” versus the more common requests for “feedback” and “thoughts” (the second most common framing from Study 2). Participants were recruited to comment on a recipient’s performance on a familiar and frequently revised work task—a job application cover letter (Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, & Lee, 2011).

7.1 Participants and Procedure

We recruited 612 adults (50.0% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.4$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.3$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk to read a job application cover letter that was rated as medium quality in a pretest, and randomly assigned each participant to “give the writer your [feedback / advice / thoughts]” using an open-response format (adapted from Grant et al. 2007). The instructions did not specify who the feedback seeker was, but simply requested the participant’s feedback, advice, or thoughts. Next, to explore whether asking for advice led input providers to adopt a greater future focus than the other solicitation methods, we assessed the input provider’s future focus using a 3-item scale (*see* Table 1, $\alpha = 0.82$).

Table 1. Items Assessing the Input Provider’s Future Focus

Statement	Scale
While providing my [advice/feedback/thoughts] to the writer, I focused...	- 2 (mostly on what the writer had done) to +2 (mostly on what the writer could do)

While providing my [advice/feedback/thoughts] to the writer, I looked...	-2 (mostly backwards to consider the work the writer had done) to +2 (mostly forwards to consider the work the writer could do)
While providing my [advice/feedback/thoughts] to the writer, I thought...	-2 (mostly about how the writer had performed) to +2 (mostly about how the writer could perform)

Participants next completed several items assessing their emotional investment in the recipient, which we report in the supplementary materials as they are not central to our theory.³ After completing these measures, they indicated their age and gender and exited the study.

The developmental nature, criticality, actionability, and usefulness of the comments were assessed by 624 independent raters (45.0% female; 6.77 raters per comment, $SD = 1.17$) using the comment coding procedures outlined in Section 6. As outlined in Section 6, we estimated each comment characteristic with a hierarchical linear model including rater random intercepts. Since there were three conditions in this study, we ran a series of hierarchical linear models estimating each comment characteristic with dummy variables for two of the three conditions.

7.2 Results

Comment Characteristics. Consistent with our theory, the developmental nature of the input that providers offered was greater when the request was framed as “advice” ($M = 0.42$, $SE = 0.04$) rather than “feedback” ($M = -0.11$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.53$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.43, 0.63], $p < .001$, or “thoughts” ($M = -0.34$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.77$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.66, 0.87], $p < .001$. Framing the

³ We explored whether givers were more emotionally invested in improving the recipient’s performance when the request was framed as asking for “advice” rather than “feedback” or “thoughts” using various measures of emotional investment (e.g. how long the giver would be willing to wait to review a letter revised based on their advice, feedback, or thoughts). We found no evidence that the framing of the request impacted the giver’s emotional investment. As these measures were not central to our theory, we do not discuss these results in the main text. See supplementary materials Supplementary Analysis A for a more detailed description of these findings.

request as “feedback” also yielded input with a more developmental nature than requesting “thoughts,” $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.34], $p < .001$, although the effect was not as large.

Framing the request as “advice” also yielded comments that were more critical ($M = 0.55$, $SE = 0.02$) than requests for “feedback” ($M = 0.47$, $SE = 0.01$), $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.12], $p < .001$, or “thoughts” ($M = 0.44$, $SE = 0.01$), $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.14], $p < .001$.

Comments offered by “feedback” providers were no more critical than comments offered by “thought” providers (see Table 2).

Requests for “advice” also yielded more suggestions ($M = 1.48$, $SE = 0.04$) compared to requests for “feedback” ($M = 1.02$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.46$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.38, 0.54], $p < .001$, or “thoughts” ($M = 0.85$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.63$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.55, 0.72], $p < .001$. The composite measure of perceived actionability ($\alpha = 0.94$) yielded similar results ($M_{Advice} = 3.29$, $SE = 0.04$; $M_{Feedback} = 2.89$, $SE = 0.04$; $b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.49], $p < .001$; $M_{Thoughts} = 2.73$, $SE = 0.04$; $b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.65], $p < .001$). Comments from “feedback” providers were slightly more actionable than comments offered by “thought” providers (see Table 2).

Comments offered in response to requests for “advice” ($M = 3.28$, $SE = 0.04$) were also rated as more useful ($\alpha = 0.92$) than comments provided to those who requested “feedback” ($M = 3.01$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.36], $p < .001$, or “thoughts” ($M = 2.88$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.48], $p < .001$. Comments offered in response to requests for “feedback” were also rated as more useful than comments offered in response to requests for “thoughts,” although the differences between these two comment solicitation framings were smaller (see Table 2).

Taken together, these findings suggest that framing the request as advice seeking (versus seeking feedback or thoughts) is more likely to yield the developmental input that feedback seekers desire, providing support for H4.

Table 2. Key Results (Study 3A)

	Feedback	Advice	<i>b_{advice vs. feedback}</i>	Thoughts	<i>b_{advice vs. thoughts}</i>	<i>b_{feedback vs. thoughts}</i>
Developmental Nature	-0.11 (0.04)	0.42 (0.04)	0.53*** (0.05)	-0.34 (0.04)	0.77*** (0.05)	0.24*** (0.05)
Criticality Ratio	0.47 (0.01)	0.55 (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.44 (0.01)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
# Suggestions	1.02 (0.04)	1.48 (0.04)	0.46*** (0.04)	0.85 (0.04)	0.63*** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.04)
Actionability ($\alpha = 0.94$)	2.89 (0.04)	3.29 (0.04)	0.41*** (0.04)	2.73 (0.04)	0.56*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.04)
Usefulness ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.01 (0.04)	3.28 (0.04)	0.28*** (0.04)	2.88 (0.04)	0.40*** (0.04)	0.13** (0.04)
			<i>d_{advice vs. feedback}</i>		<i>d_{advice vs. thoughts}</i>	<i>d_{feedback vs. thoughts}</i>
Future Focus¹ ($\alpha = 0.82$)	0.15 (1.02)	0.56 (0.92)	0.42***	0.13 (1.06)	0.43***	0.02
Comment Length¹	190.33 (136.95)	211.51 (161.76)	0.14	183.15 (138.18)	0.19	0.05

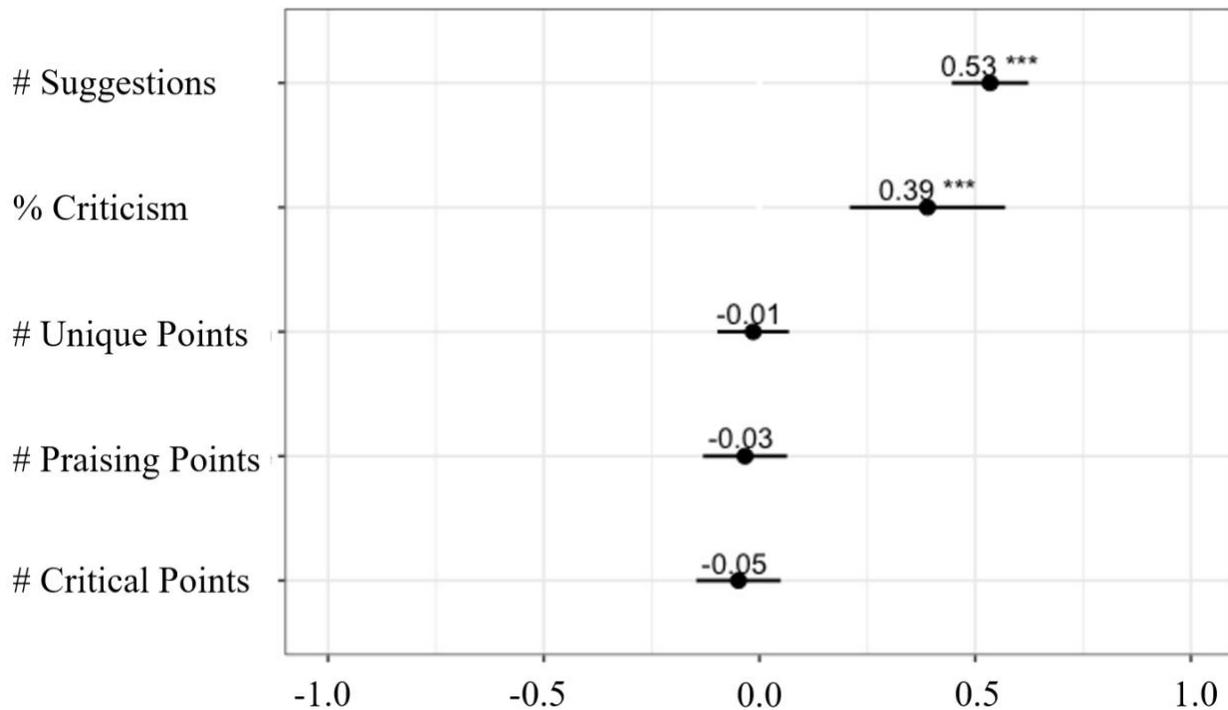
Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$
All results, unless otherwise indicated, are outputs from a hierarchical linear model (HLM) with rater random intercepts. We estimated each dependent variable with a dummy variable for two of the conditions. We report estimated marginal means and their standard errors.
¹Results from two-sample t-tests with p -value adjustment for multiple comparisons using Tukey's method.

Predicting Developmental Nature. We also conducted an exploratory analysis to assess the comment characteristics that predict the extent to which they were rated as having a developmental nature (the first dependent variable we outline in Section 6.2). Using a hierarchical linear model (HLM), we estimated each rater's assessment of a comment's developmental nature with the number of unique points, number of praising points, number of critical points, number of suggestions, and

criticality ratio (i.e. # critical points / (# critical points + # praising points)) as predictors. We included a random intercept term to account for natural variance across raters (Moneta et al. 2010).

In line with our theorizing, the number of suggestions ($b = 0.53$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.62], $p < .001$) and criticality ratio ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.57], $p < .001$) positively predicted the developmental nature of a comment. In contrast, the overall number of unique points raised ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.07], $p = .729$), absolute number of praising points ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.06], $p = .502$), and absolute number of critical points ($b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.05], $p = .331$), did not. These findings support our theory that the key characteristics of developmental input, which feedback seekers desire, are criticality and actionability (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Predictors of a Comment’s Developmental Nature

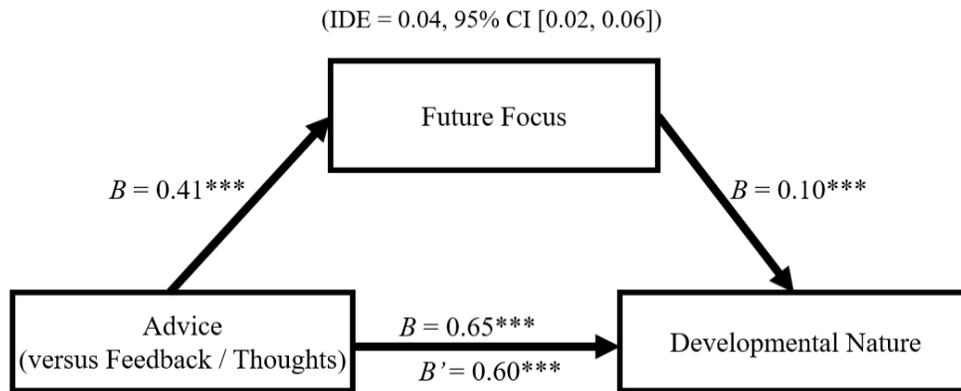


Future Focus. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition on future focus ($F(2, 609) = 12.0$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey’s method revealed that, in line with H5, providers were more future focused when the request was framed as

“advice” ($M = 0.56, SD = 0.92$) than when it was framed as “feedback” ($M = 0.15, SD = 1.02$), $t(403.43) = 4.29, p < .001, d = 0.42$, or “thoughts” ($M = 0.13, SD = 1.06$), $t(396.95) = 4.37, p < .001, d = 0.43$. Providers who were asked for “feedback” were no more future focused than providers who were asked for their “thoughts,” $t(406.81) = 0.19, p = .978, d = 0.02$.

We examined whether the input provider’s future focus explained the greater developmental nature of the comments offered by providers who were asked to provide “advice” as opposed to “feedback” or “thoughts” through a bootstrap mediation path analysis using the “lavaan” package in R (Rosseel, 2012). Supporting H6, the input provider’s greater future focus significantly explained the positive effects of framing the request as “advice” (versus “feedback” or “thoughts”) on the developmental nature of the input (IDE = 0.04, 95% CI [0.02, 0.06]; Figure 3).

Figure 3. Future Focus Mediates the Effect of “Advice” Framing on the Developmental Nature of the Input



Note: Bootstrap simulation with 5,000 resamples.

These results suggest that the data are consistent with our theoretical model; requesting “advice” rather than “feedback” or “thoughts” elicited a greater future focus from the input provider, and consequently resulted in their provision of more developmental input.

7.3 Discussion

Study 3A offers initial evidence that framing requests for third-party input as “advice” rather than other commonly used framings, such as “feedback” or “thoughts,” yields more developmental, critical, and actionable input. Our data were consistent with the hypothesis that this content difference was driven by advice requests spurring input providers to adopt a greater future focus. Compared to the ‘neutral’ time referent condition, “thoughts,” our findings suggest that the content divergence between input offered when asked for “advice” relative to “feedback” is driven by requests for “advice” increasing a provider’s future focus, rather than requests for “feedback” dampening it. Study 3A also offers evidence that the two key characteristics that determine the extent to which a comment has a developmental nature are its proportion of criticism and number of suggestions. Additionally, our findings suggest that beyond eliciting more developmental comments, requests for “advice,” relative to those for “feedback” or “thoughts” yield greater value; they were rated as more useful.

In two additional studies (supplementary materials Studies C and D), we replicated the results comparing requests for “advice” with requests for “feedback.” We first replicated the effect with input given on an interpersonal task, an introductory conversation (see supplementary materials Study C). In preregistered supplementary materials Study D, we again asked participants to provide written feedback on a cover letter, but included a different third condition: we compared requests for “advice” and “feedback” with requests for “developmental feedback,” the term used in prior literature to describe the type of developmental insights our theory and evidence suggest feedback seekers desire (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011; Zhou, 2003).⁴ Employees who were asked for advice provided comments that were significantly more developmental, critical, and actionable than those who were asked for developmental feedback (see supplementary materials Study D). These

⁴ Although, as we noted in our discussion of Study 2, no employee used the term “developmental feedback” when requesting this type of information.

findings suggest that soliciting “advice” (e.g. versus “developmental feedback”) may best engender the future focus that prompts input providers to generate the developmental comments seekers desire.

8. Study 3B: Providing Advice vs. Feedback on a Real-World Colleague’s Work Task

Building from our findings in Study 3A, in Study 3B we aimed to replicate our main effect in a context with greater external validity, testing our hypotheses across a variety of real-world workplace tasks by asking employees for input on one of their real-life colleague's work.

8.1 Participants and Procedure

We recruited 194 employed adults who worked at least 21 hours a week (39.7% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.08$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.66$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk to answer a survey about their workplace experiences. We asked employees to reflect on the most recent time they observed a colleague complete a work task in which they could have assessed their colleague’s performance. They described their relationship with this person, the task they observed, and the person’s performance using an open-response format. The task descriptions averaged 58.8 characters ($SD = 46.32$), and participants described a wide variety of tasks, ranging from “putting labels on items” to “creating a new marketing strategy.” Participants were then randomly assigned to “provide feedback (advice) to your colleague about the performance you described” using an open-response format. As in Study 3A, the instructions did not clarify the identity of the feedback seeker, and simply requested the participant’s feedback or advice on their colleague’s task performance. We assessed the comments using the procedures outlined above in Section 6 ($N = 188$ raters; 45.7% female; 6.78 raters per comment, $SD = 1.21$).

To explore whether requests for “advice” elicited a greater future focus from the input providers relative to “feedback” requests, input providers indicated how focused they were on the recipients’ future (versus past) performance while providing their comments, rating their focus on a

Likert scale of -2 (mostly on what the recipient (writer) has done) to +2 (mostly on what the recipient (writer) could do).⁵

Then, to address the possibility that condition differences were driven by differences in the recalled situations, we measured and controlled for several characteristics of the recipient and their tasks: their rank relative to the recipient (-1 = [*the recipient*] is higher in rank than me, 0 = [*the recipient*] and I belong to the same rank, 1 = [*the recipient*] is lower in rank than me; Schaerer, Tost, Huang, Gino, & Larrick, 2018), their interpersonal closeness to the recipient (by responding to the question “how would you describe your relationship with the recipient?” on a scale 1 = *extremely distant*, 7 = *extremely close*; adapted from Aron, Aron, & Smollan 1992), and the quality of their performance (I thought [the recipient’s] performance on the task I described above was... 1 = *very poor*, 7 = *very good*). Finally, participants indicated their age and gender, and exited the study.

8.2 Results

Consistent with Study 3A and providing additional support for H4, colleagues asked to provide “advice” (versus “feedback”) wrote comments with a more developmental nature ($M_{Advice} = 0.51$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.06$; $M_{Feedback} = -0.26$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.07$), $b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.61, 0.91], $p < .001$, that were more critical ($M_{Advice} = 0.38$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.02$; $M_{Feedback} = 0.24$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.02$), $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.18], $p < .001$, contained more suggestions ($M_{Advice} = 1.66$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.08$; $M_{Feedback} = 1.06$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.08$), $b = 0.60$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.72], $p < .001$, and that were more actionable ($\alpha = 0.92$; $M_{Advice} = 3.44$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.06$; $M_{Feedback} = 2.97$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.06$), $b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.59], $p < .001$. Again, replicating our earlier findings, advice was also rated as more useful ($\alpha = 0.91$) than feedback ($M_{Advice} = 3.39$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.06$; $M_{Feedback} = 3.11$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.06$), $b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.40], $p < .001$.

⁵ Our survey included several additional exploratory measures to consider whether framing the request as “advice” or “feedback” would impact the giver’s mindset in other significant ways. We found no difference across conditions for any of these variables. See supplementary materials Supplementary Analysis B.

All of these results remained consistent when controlling for the situational and demographic variables we collected (provider’s relative rank, provider’s felt closeness to the recipient, provider’s assessment of recipient’s performance, provider’s age, and provider’s gender; see supplementary materials Supplementary Analysis C).

Input providers were also more focused on their colleague’s future performance when they were asked to offer “advice” ($M = 0.53, SD = 1.10$) rather than “feedback” ($M = 0.04, SD = 1.33$), $t(177.19) = 2.77, p = .006, d = 0.40$, consistent with the results from Study 3A and H5. A bootstrap mediation path analysis using the “lavaan” package in R revealed that, in line with H6, the input provider’s greater future focus significantly mediated the positive effects of framing the request as “advice” (versus “feedback”) on the developmental nature of the comment (IDE = 0.10, 95% CI [0.06. 0.14]).

Table 3. Key Results (Study 3B)

	Feedback	Advice	<i>b</i>
Developmental Nature	-0.26 (0.07)	0.51 (0.06)	0.76*** (0.08)
Criticality Ratio	0.24 (0.02)	0.38 (0.02)	0.13*** (0.03)
# Suggestions	1.06 (0.08)	1.66 (0.08)	0.60*** (0.06)
Actionability ($\alpha = 0.92$)	2.97 (0.06)	3.44 (0.06)	0.47*** (0.06)
Usefulness ($\alpha = 0.91$)	3.11 (0.06)	3.39 (0.06)	0.28*** (0.06)
			<i>d</i>
Future Focus¹	0.04 (1.33)	0.53 (1.10)	0.40**

Comment Length¹	176.12 (110.17)	165.20 (97.22)	0.14
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Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

All results, unless otherwise indicated, are outputs from hierarchical linear models (HLM) with rater random intercepts. We report estimated marginal means and their standard errors.

¹Results from two-sample t-tests with p -value adjustment for multiple comparisons using the Tukey’s method

8.3 Discussion

Study 3B replicates our findings from Study 3A that framing a request for developmental input as “advice” rather than “feedback” yields more developmental input, in a more ecologically valid context: employed adults offering input about their colleagues’ work tasks. As in Study 3A, the positive effect of the “advice” (versus “feedback”) frame was driven by the greater future focus elicited from the input provider.

9. Study 3C: Providing Seeker-Requested Advice vs. Feedback

Thus far, our studies have not clarified the identity of the requester. Study 3C addresses the possibility that the content differences we observed could differ in the context of direct feedback-seeking interactions, when the requester is clearly the comment recipient (Ashford et al., 2016, Gong et al., 2017). We anticipated that at least some of the effects from eliciting a future-focused mindset in the input provider would persist (i.e. that those asked for “advice” rather than feedback would deliver more actionable content), although we were less certain about the strength of the effect of seeking “advice” on criticality given prior research showing that input providers are generally reluctant to deliver negative comments (Blakely, 1993; Rosen & Tesser, 1970). This study was preregistered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=bi8kp3>).

9.1 Participants and Procedure

We recruited 501 adults (46.7% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.51$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.39$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk. As in Study 3A, participants reviewed a job post and cover letter. Departing from

Study 3A, however, participants also read an email request ostensibly from the job applicant, seeking input on their cover letter. Depending on the participant's condition, in the email, the applicant requested either the participant's feedback or advice: "Hello, I am applying to the following tutoring job. Could you give me some [feedback / advice] on my cover letter (attached below)?" Participants' responses averaged 236.15 characters ($SD = 208.13$, and the number of characters did not significantly differ between conditions). We assessed the developmental nature, criticality, actionability, and usefulness of the comments using the comment coding procedures outlined in Section 6 with 513 independent raters (46.6% female; 7.16 raters per comment, $SD = 1.09$).

To examine whether a recipient's request for "advice" elicited a greater future focus from the input provider compared to asking for "feedback," we assessed the input provider's future focus with the 3-item scale used in Study 3A ($\alpha = 0.82$).

9.2 Results

Consistent with our prior results, recipients' request for "advice" (versus "feedback") yielded comments with a more developmental nature ($M_{Advice} = 0.37$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.04$; $M_{Feedback} = 0.09$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.04$), $b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.37], $p < .001$, that included more suggestions ($M_{Advice} = 1.54$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.03$; $M_{Feedback} = 1.38$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.04$), $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.24], $p < .001$, and were rated as more actionable ($\alpha = 0.93$; $M_{Advice} = 3.29$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.04$; $M_{Feedback} = 3.15$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.04$), $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.21], $p < .001$, and useful ($\alpha = 0.94$; $M_{Advice} = 3.27$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.04$; $M_{Feedback} = 3.18$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.04$), $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.15], $p = .023$. However, unlike the results of Studies 3A and 3B, comments from the advice condition did not significantly differ in their criticality ($M_{Advice} = 0.55$, $SD_{Advice} = 0.01$; $M_{Feedback} = 0.54$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.01$), $b = 0.005$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.04], $p = .754$.

Replicating Studies 3A and 3B, input providers were more future focused ($\alpha = 0.82$) when responding to requests for "advice" ($M = 0.38$, $SD = 1.03$) rather than "feedback" ($M = 0.18$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(483.84) = 2.11$, $p = .036$, $d = 0.19$. Consistent with Studies 3A and 3B, a bootstrap mediation

path analysis revealed that the input provider's greater future focus explained the positive effects of framing the request as "advice" (versus "feedback") on the developmental nature of the input (IDE = 0.03, 95% CI [0.02, 0.04]).

9.3 Discussion

Study 3C replicates many of the positive effects of using the "advice" frame rather than the "feedback" frame when requesting developmental third-party input, in a context where the would-be recipient makes the request. As in Studies 3A and 3B, requests for "advice" (versus "feedback") yielded more input with a more developmental nature by promoting a greater future focus in the input provider. However, diverging from Studies 3A and 3B, the "advice" frame did not yield more critical comments compared to the "feedback" frame. These results may reflect input providers' unwillingness to deliver criticism when directly interacting with the recipient, out of fear of negative interpersonal reactions (a phenomenon Rosen & Tesser (1970) dubbed "the MUM Effect"), even under the "advice" frame. Nevertheless, we find that the "advice" frame yielded more actionable input that could help the recipient develop their performance compared to the "feedback" frame, even when the would-be recipients themselves directly solicited the input.

10. Study 4: Providing Advice vs. Feedback in the Field

In Study 4, we conducted a field experiment to replicate the effect of framing developmental input requests as requests for "advice" (versus "feedback") in a frequent real-world feedback solicitation setting—course evaluations of professors.

10.1 Participants and Procedure

Seventy-three executive education students (51.0% female; 80.8% non-U.S. residents; 54.8% private sector) from a global two-week leadership course were asked to complete an end-of-course evaluation survey. Executives were randomly assigned to receive an anonymous link to an evaluation form in which they filled out numeric ratings of the instructors and the course, and had the option of writing a free-response answer in a comment box at the end of the form to provide "Feedback for

[Instructor Name]” or “Advice for [Instructor Name]” for each of the 18 instructors (38.9% female) they had throughout the course. Sixty-two students completed the evaluation, yielding 309 comments. The feedback comments averaged 150.84 characters ($SD = 132.54$, and the number of characters did not significantly differ between conditions). We assessed the criticality and actionability of these comments using the procedures outlined in Section 6 above with 278 adult raters (54.7% female). This procedure yielded an average of 9.00 raters per comment ($SD = 1.99$).

10.2 Results and Discussion

Replicating our findings from Studies 3A-3C, students who were asked to provide advice provided comments that were more critical ($M_{Advice} = 0.37$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.01$; $M_{Feedback} = 0.33$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.01$), $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.06], $p = .014$, and more actionable ($\alpha = 0.93$; $M_{Advice} = 2.37$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.06$; $M_{Feedback} = 2.22$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.06$), $b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.23], $p < .001$ as compared to students who were asked to provide feedback. However, students did not provide more suggestions when asked to provide advice ($M_{Advice} = 1.88$, $SE_{Advice} = 0.51$; $M_{Feedback} = 1.96$, $SE_{Feedback} = 0.50$), $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.22$, 95% CI [-0.51, 0.36], $p = .744$. The lack of difference in the number of suggestions may have been driven by students generally being less likely to offer suggestions to instructors, who typically have greater expertise in teaching, and more power than they do. This study may also have been underpowered due to the relatively low sample size.

Study 4 replicates the effectiveness of soliciting advice instead of feedback in an authentic organizational setting when individuals do not know that their behavior is being studied. Although the author of the “advice” or “feedback” survey was not clear to students (and could thus have been interpreted as a direct request from the faculty member), this study also demonstrates the potential for organizations to improve the criticality and actionability of the comments generated in the course of their organizational evaluation processes (such as performance reviews and event evaluations) by replacing their requests for “feedback” with requests for “advice.”

11. General Discussion

Managers and employees depend on the feedback they seek to gain new insights and advance their careers (Ashford et al., 2016; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Across six studies, including a field experiment, we explored whether the means by which people commonly solicit information to improve their performance is suboptimal for generating the content they desire. From the recipient perspective, feedback seekers are primarily motivated to improve their performance, and thus hope to receive developmental input (Study 1). Furthermore, those who seek such developmental input most commonly use the word “feedback” in making their request, even when they are offered an alternative way of framing their request, which could be more likely to generate developmental comments: asking for “advice” (Study 2). Indeed, across a diverse range of tasks, samples, and provider-seeker relationships, when responding to a request for “feedback” rather than “advice,” input providers adopted a less future-focused mindset (Studies 3A-3C), and consequently provided information that was less developmental (Studies 3A-4), and evaluated as less useful (Studies 3A-C).

11.1 Theoretical Contributions

Our findings add to the literature on feedback processes and workplace information exchange in several ways. First, our findings illuminate the value of considering feedback-seeking-and-giving as an interpersonal process, in which the actions of one party influence those of the other. By investigating both the seeker and provider perspective, this work highlights a suboptimal feedback-seeking-and-giving process: although feedback seekers desire developmental information, the way they typically request it, by asking for “feedback,” fails to shift input providers into the future-oriented mindset that best facilitates the delivery of developmental insights. Our research suggests that adopting a process-based perspective of critical workplace communications could yield additional valuable insights exploring how the means by which managers and employees seek information influences the nature of the content they receive.

Investigating feedback delivery as an interpersonal process also deepens the collective understanding of these exchanges by illuminating the phenomenon at the level of the individual

request. Although prior feedback-seeking research has generated valuable insight into the antecedents and consequences of informational interactions, it largely does so with a bird's eye view, evaluating generalized, scale-based measures of aggregate feedback-seeking behaviors like asking one's colleagues about one's work performance (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986). Examining the feedback process at the individual request level allows us to evaluate the specific means by which feedback seekers request the information they desire and to assess the exact content input providers deliver.

This focus at the individual request level also sheds light on the feedback process in other ways. For example, our analyses of feedback content enabled us to identify the feedback characteristics that best predict perceptions that the input is developmental in nature: the proportion of unique points that highlight what the recipient did not do well, and the number of suggestions the comment includes, as opposed to other characteristics, such as the total number of points (see Figure 2 on page 25). This focus on content enables us to draw a connection between these two feedback characteristics and its usefulness.

Our investigation also highlights a novel, easily malleable psychological factor that impacts feedback quality: the input provider's temporal focus (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). Prior research demonstrates how individual differences and relatively stable traits, such as the input provider's gender (De Kraker-Pauw, Van Wesel, Krabbendam, & Van Atteveldt, 2017), the nature of the established relationship between the seeker and the input provider (Finkelstein et al. 2017), and the input provider's concern for the recipient's feelings (Dibble, 2018) can influence the characteristics of the input that people provide. Our research demonstrates that transitory states of the input provider – in this case their future focus – can also meaningfully impact the developmental nature of the input that they provide.

Finally, this research also offers one of the first comparisons between two primary means of soliciting third-party input: asking for feedback and asking for advice. Although our investigation

suggests these two developmental communication processes may often act as substitutes, they have seldom been considered in tandem. Our work suggests viewing them in parallel may yield valuable new connections between these two forms of workplace developmental exchanges.

11.2 Future Directions

Our research also has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, because our investigation of feedback seekers' goals revealed that the majority of feedback seekers hope to gain developmental insights to improve, our research focused on enhancing input to facilitate self-improvement. Future work could consider whether seeking "advice" rather than "feedback" may also offer advantages to feedback seekers with different goals, such as self-verification or impression management. For example, seeking "advice" can flatter those asked to provide it, suggesting doing so may act as a positive impression management strategy (Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015). Similarly, future work could consider whether other information request strategies may better elicit the type of input seekers with other goals desire. For instance, perhaps those seeking exclusively positive feedback would be better served by framing their request as a bid for encouragement.

Second, our investigation of the content-related benefits of seeking "advice" rather than "feedback" primarily centered on asynchronous, written input, often without clarity regarding from whom the request came (i.e. whether it was from the recipient or the organization). Although this is the form that developmental input provision often takes, as organizations often collect written information to deliver to their employees (More, 2020), developmental comments may also be exchanged in person, verbally. Future work could consider how our findings could differ in such live verbal exchanges. One difference between the contexts we studied and live conversation is that communicating in person is likely to make the recipient more salient. Such salience may reduce the criticality of the comments a provider shares. In our study in which the recipient was most salient, Study 3C, input providers directly asked for advice by the recipient did not provide comments that were more critical (although they did share information that was significantly more actionable and

rated as more developmental). The norm of politeness in face-to-face interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987), may similarly diminish the criticality of comments delivered in person. A second difference between written and in person input delivery is the potential for recipients to make additional inquiries. If input providers approach their responses to such inquiries with a future orientation, they may end up sharing more critical information as part of the conversation. Future investigations comparing advice frames and feedback frames in conversational contexts would help to illuminate these possibilities.

Future work could also consider the extent to which providers make inferences about the goals of those seeking “advice” versus “feedback.” For example, input providers may believe seekers of “advice” (versus “feedback”) are more future focused and motivated, and thus may be more willing to provide “advice” seekers with subsequent development opportunities. Such inferences about the person seeking input could have downstream implications for whether and how developmental input providers continue to interact with the requester (Blunden, Logg, Brooks, John, & Gino, 2019).

Research could also explore the extent to which the content input providers deliver may vary as a function of the provider and recipient’s characteristics. Although our effect remained consistent when we controlled for provider closeness to the recipient as well as the parties’ relative rank (Study 3B, supplementary materials Supplementary Analysis C), future work could consider whether other provider or recipient traits could influence the effect of seeking advice versus feedback. For example, those in significantly lower power positions may be hesitant to deliver critical comments or provide suggestions in general (Athanassiades, 1973; Morrison, 2011), dampening any effect resulting from the solicitation of advice versus feedback.

Although the present work sheds light on the provision of constructive comments from the *provider’s* perspective, future research examining *recipient* reactions to constructive input framed as “advice” or feedback” could also yield useful insights for performance improvement. Recipients of critical feedback often discount the information they receive (Podsakoff & Farh, 1989) and dislike its

providers (Blakely 1993, John et al. 2019). This is because people often infer that constructive comments indicate negative evaluations about themselves (Blaine & Crocker, 1993). However, if the same information is framed as “advice” rather than “feedback,” recipients may be more willing to act on it because the future-oriented nature of the input may (1) be less likely to spur negative emotion, and (2) expand the input seekers’ perceived options. Indeed, recent research has found that feedback recipients are more motivated to improve when the feedback focuses more on future actions rather than past performance (Gnepp, Klayman, Williamson, & Barlas, 2020). These findings suggest that framing feedback as “advice” may foster greater adoption. Future research should test this proposition.

Although we uncovered evidence of a suboptimal feedback-seeking-and-giving process, our assessment of input quality (i.e. the extent to which it was developmental) relied on third party ratings of the comments input providers delivered. Although some prior work has illustrated convergence between third party and recipient ratings of feedback characteristics (Blunden, Green, & Gino, 2020), future work assessing these characteristics from the recipient viewpoint could illuminate, for example, the extent to which recipients intend to change their behavior as a result of receiving them.

Relatedly, although we found a correlation between critical and actionable comments and their perceived usefulness, this relationship may be moderated by the broader context of these developmental exchanges. Schroeder and Fishbach (2015) propose that critical feedback may be more effective when it is used to motivate experts who are already committed to improving their performance, whereas positive feedback may better motivate novices who are not yet committed to their performance goals. Relatedly, people who are novices or who are low performers might want to solicit feedback (versus advice) to minimize criticality and encourage task persistence. Future research could test this possibility as well as other situations in which the solicitation of feedback or advice could be especially beneficial.

11.3 Practical Implications

Our research illuminates a suboptimal feedback-seeking-and-giving process; by requesting “feedback,” those who are seeking developmental insights receive comments that are less in line with their goals than if they had prompted a future orientation in their input provider by asking for “advice.” In doing so, we identify a costless, easy-to-implement intervention to solicit developmental, critical, and actionable information: managers, employees, and organizational leaders designing feedback forms intended to elicit developmental information could solicit “advice” instead.

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Soliciting Advice Rather Than Feedback Yields More Developmental, Critical, and Actionable Input

Supplementary Materials

This supplement contains:

- **Comment Analysis Detail**
 - Example of Comments Provided Across Studies
 - Summary of Comment Rating Across Studies
- **Supplementary Studies**
 - Supplementary Study A: Survey of Advice-Giving Experience
 - Supplementary Study B: Major Components of Feedback
 - Supplementary Study C: Giving Advice vs. Feedback for Interpersonal Communication
 - Supplementary Study D: Giving Advice vs. Feedback vs. Developmental Feedback
- **Supplementary Analyses:**
 - A: Exploratory Emotional Investment Measures (Study 3A)
 - B: Exploratory Alternative Mechanism Measures (Study 3B)
 - C: Results Controlling for Work Situation (Study 3B)

Comment Analysis Detail

Examples of Comments Provided Across Studies

	Feedback	Advice
Study 3A	The letter is detailed and has good content in respect to what the purpose is. But it lacked one thing which is the academical qualification of the prospective applicant. Over all, it is a good write up.	I would say the applicant to be more specific about their teaching experience. I would also encourage them to give examples of ways that they have developed their good communication skills or that demonstrate their love of learning. I would also encourage them to not describe teaching as "dealing with kids" as that sounds rather negative and impersonal.
Study 3B	A very good performance without any complaints related to his work, does a job very well and is given to respect in his position even though that is very good person in the workplace does not depend on that knows differentiate Tranajo friendship . [sic]	In the future, it would be good for you to begin a checklist early. Please know that others look to your reactions to gauge how the event is going. i suggest checking in with our executive frequently and during the event, please walk around be present to make sure people see you.
Study 3C	I thought the letter was poorly written as it included run on sentences. There were times where the writer was being formal and others where the writer was being too informal.	For advice, I would change the words "since I like reading a lot" to something more descriptive. Also, I would expand on past experiences to show that you are prepared to work with a student who as [sic] trouble focusing. I would also take out "looking forward to an interview invite" to something more vague because you might not be invited back for an interview.
Study 4	Faculty 14's content and style of teaching were very good. The an [sic] appropriate subject for a program like this. I also enjoyed how Faculty 14 used great analogies to get the concepts across. Lastly, the fact that his focus was global made the sessions even more relevant.	I loved the cases. I did not like the fact that the classes became a repetition of what each member did in the [redacted] and going over the potential outcomes of those negotiations. I would have preferred those conclusions to be a portion of the class after the case, while concentrating more time on learning specific tools that would help improve the negotiation skills of the participants.

Summary of Comment Rating Across Studies

Study 3A								
	Mean (SD)	ICC	Feedback	Advice	$b_{advice\ vs.\ feedback}$	Thoughts	$b_{advice\ vs.\ thoughts}$	$b_{feedback\ vs.\ thoughts}$
Developmental Nature	-0.02 (1.47)	0.64	-0.11 (0.04)	0.42 (0.04)	0.53***	-0.34 (0.04)	0.77***	0.24***
% Criticism	0.48 (0.44)	0.90	0.47 (0.01)	0.55 (0.02)	0.08***	0.44 (0.01)	0.10***	0.02
# Suggestion	1.11 (1.24)	0.73	1.02 (0.04)	1.48 (0.04)	0.46***	0.85 (0.04)	0.63***	0.18***
3-item actionability ($\alpha = 0.94$)	2.96 (1.31)	0.65	2.89 (0.04)	3.29 (0.04)	0.41***	2.73 (0.04)	0.56***	0.15***
3-item usefulness ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.05 (1.26)	0.48	3.01 (0.04)	3.28 (0.04)	0.28***	2.88 (0.04)	0.40***	0.13**
# Unique Points	2.97 (1.86)	0.56	2.97 (0.07)	3.03 (0.07)	0.07	2.99 (0.07)	0.04	-0.03
# Evaluation ¹	1.61 (1.43)	0.61	1.65 (0.05)	1.32 (0.05)	-0.33***	1.88 (0.05)	-0.55***	-0.22***
# Criticism	0.80 (1.12)	0.79	0.78 (0.03)	0.70 (0.03)	-0.08 [†]	0.90 (0.03)	-0.20***	-0.11**
# Praise	0.81 (1.09)	0.72	0.87 (0.04)	0.61 (0.04)	-0.26***	0.97 (0.04)	-0.36***	-0.10**
Study 3B								
	Mean (SD)	ICC	Feedback	Advice	b			
Developmental Nature	0.15 (1.47)	0.90	-0.26 (0.07)	0.51 (0.06)	0.76***			
% Criticism	0.31 (0.38)	0.85	0.24 (0.02)	0.38 (0.02)	0.13***			
# Suggestion	1.38 (1.39)	0.61	1.06 (0.08)	1.66 (0.08)	0.60***			
3-item actionability ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.22 (1.29)	0.64	2.97 (0.06)	3.44 (0.06)	0.47***			
3-item usefulness ($\alpha = 0.91$)	3.26 (1.23)	0.52	3.11 (0.06)	3.39 (0.06)	0.28***			

# Unique Points	3.00 (1.89)	0.51	3.08 (0.12)	2.93 (0.12)	0.14*
# Evaluation ¹	1.36 (1.42)	0.73	1.73 (0.08)	1.03 (0.07)	-0.70***
# Criticism	0.42 (0.78)	0.67	0.47 (0.04)	0.37 (0.04)	-0.10*
# Praise	0.94 (1.14)	0.78	1.27 (0.05)	0.65 (0.05)	-0.62***

Study 3C

	Mean (SD)	ICC	Feedback	Advice	<i>b</i> _{advice vs. feedback}
Developmental Nature	0.24 (1.42)	0.62	0.09 (0.04)	0.37 (0.04)	0.28***
% Criticism	0.54 (0.44)	0.91	0.54 (0.01)	0.55 (0.01)	0.01
# Suggestion	1.46 (1.32)	0.82	1.38 (0.04)	1.54 (0.03)	0.15***
3-item actionability ($\alpha = 0.93$)	3.22 (1.24)	0.67	3.15 (0.04)	3.29 (0.04)	0.14***
3-item usefulness ($\alpha = 0.94$)	3.23 (1.23)	0.56	3.18 (0.04)	3.27 (0.04)	0.08*
# Unique Points	2.99 (1.77)	0.75	3.07 (0.06)	2.92 (0.06)	-0.15**
# Evaluation ¹	1.33 (1.29)	0.70	1.45 (0.04)	1.23 (0.04)	-0.22***
# Criticism	0.74 (1.02)	0.80	0.81 (0.03)	0.67 (0.03)	-0.14***
# Praise	0.59 (0.90)	0.75	0.64 (0.03)	0.55 (0.03)	-0.09**

Study 4

	Mean (SD)	ICC	Feedback	Advice	<i>b</i>
% Criticism	0.35 (0.37)	0.93	0.33 (0.01)	0.37 (0.01)	0.04*
# Suggestion	1.93 (9.78)	0.48	1.96 (0.50)	1.88 (0.51)	-0.07

3-item actionability ($\alpha = 0.93$)	2.28 (1.24)	0.67	2.22 (0.06)	2.37 (0.06)	0.16***
# Unique Points	3.13 (5.43)	0.53	3.19 (0.27)	3.06 (0.28)	-0.13
# Evaluation ¹	3.93 (9.92)	0.74	4.01 (0.53)	3.84 (0.53)	-0.17
# Criticism	1.67 (5.42)	0.65	1.67 (0.28)	1.66 (0.28)	-0.02
# Praise	2.27 (5.11)	0.88	2.34 (0.26)	2.18 (0.27)	-0.16
1-item specificity	3.40 (1.64)	0.73	3.32 (0.07)	3.49 (0.07)	0.17**

Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

Results are outputs from hierarchical linear models (HLM) with rater random intercepts. We report estimated marginal means and their standard errors.

¹Number of comments pertaining to the recipient's past performance defined as the sum of # Criticism and # Praise.

Supplementary Study A: Survey of Advice-Giving Experience

In this supplementary study, we examined the reasons employees give advice to their colleagues. In our preregistration (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=8gr52k>), we predicted that people would give advice to improve their colleagues' performance.

Participants and Procedure

We recruited 150 full-time employees who had given advice to a colleague at work (39.33% female; $M_{\text{age}}=36.30$ years, $SD_{\text{age}}=10.83$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk to answer a survey about their workplace experience in exchange for \$0.50.

Participants recalled and wrote about the last time they gave advice to someone at work. They described the advice they gave and the recipient. Then participants indicated the primary purpose of their advice, with a response set of five choices derived from a pretest in which we coded open-ended responses about workplace advice-giving: to help the seeker... "improve performance," "improve decision making," "improve a relationship," "make a positive impression," or "other," an option which included a text box in which participants could write the "other" reason. Then, participants indicated their gender and age and exited the study.

Results and Discussion

The greatest proportion of participants (44.00%) indicated that they had given advice to improve their colleague's performance, a rate greater than a random chance (20% if a participant had randomly selected among the five options; $t = 5.90$, $p < .001$, $d = .48$). 25.33% of participants indicated they had given advice to improve the recipient's decision making, 14.00% had given advice to improve a relationship, 3.33% of participants had given advice to make a positive impression, and 13.33% of participants indicated another reason (e.g. improve the recipient's finances or health).

These results indicate that a significant proportion of employees give advice in order to improve a colleague's performance, suggesting asking for "advice" may be a possible alternative to asking for "feedback" to gain developmental insights for improvement.

Supplementary Study B: Major Components of Feedback

In this supplementary study, we aimed to examine how feedback content can be categorized.

Participants and Procedure

98 participants (45.92% female; $M_{age}=34.66$ years, $SD_{age}=9.86$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk rated people's feedback on someone else's performance. Participants were shown one random feedback comment collected from our studies. 98 different feedback comments were analyzed in this study.

Participants first parsed out the different unique points the comment made.

This application is mostly good. This person seems nice. But I saw a few grammatical errors which would bother me if I was hiring someone to tutor my child in reading/writing. It should be more personal. You are being hired as a tutor/baby sitter not a teacher. I would suggest giving examples of your work history, actual example of how you helped similar kids succeed and stay focused.

In the space below, please list all the different points this feedback is making.

Point 1	<input type="text" value="This application is mostly good"/>
Point 2	<input type="text" value="This person seems nice"/>
Point 3	<input type="text" value="I saw a few grammatical errors"/>
Point 4	<input type="text" value="It should be more personal"/>
Point 5	<input type="text" value="I suggest giving examples of work history/how you helped kids"/>
Point 6	<input type="text"/>
Point 7	<input type="text"/>
Point 8	<input type="text"/>
Point 9	<input type="text"/>
Point 10	<input type="text"/>

Then, they categorized each point based on whether it 1) identified something the performer did well (praise), 2) identified something the performer did not do well (criticism), 3) provided suggestions on what to do / not do in the future (suggestion), 4) or belonged to none of the above categories (with an open-ended response asking how the participants would categorize the comment).

Items

<p>Provides suggestions on what to do / not do in the future</p> <p>1 It should be more personal</p> <p>2 I suggest giving examples of work history/how you helped kids</p>	<p>Praises things the performer did well</p> <p>1 This person seems nice</p> <p>2 This application is mostly good</p>
	<p>Criticizes things the performer did not do well</p> <p>1 I saw a few grammatical errors</p>
<p>None of the above</p>	

Results and Discussion

Participants identified a median of 3 unique points per comment, with a minimum of 1 and maximum of 9. Across 98 comments, 312 unique points were identified.

Supporting our theory that praise, criticism, and suggestion are the main categories of the information conveyed in feedback, participants successfully categorized all 312 unique points as either praise (50 out of 312), criticism (25 out of 312), or suggestion (79 out of 312). No additional categories were suggested.

Supplementary Study C: Giving Advice vs. Feedback for Interpersonal Communication

In this supplementary study, we aimed to replicate and extend the findings in our main studies by considering evaluations of an interpersonal task: an introductory conversation with a stranger.

Participants and Procedure

193 participants (49.74% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.65$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.41$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk completed a study with an interaction partner. In addition to these participants, 106 people were recruited for the study but were unable to complete the task because they were not matched with a partner or did not have sufficient time to interact.

Participants were connected with another participant to hold a conversation for at least 3 minutes on ChatPlat, a web application that enables participants to converse in real time (e.g., Blunden, Logg, Brooks, John, & Gino, 2019; Huang, Yeomans, Brooks, Minson, & Gino, 2017). Participants were told to consider the interaction like a networking conversation, in which the goal was “to get to know each other and make a positive impression.”

Following the chat session, one participant in each dyad was assigned the role of feedback giver, and the other was assigned the role of advisor. Participants were reminded of their partners’ goals (i.e. “get to know you and make a positive impression”) and asked to “give your partner feedback (advice) about his/her conversation style.” using a free-response format.

Next, we aimed to explore whether advice givers provided more critical comments than feedback givers, holding constant their ability to recognize the points in need of improvement. Participants were presented with 28 potential comments that varied in criticality, generated based on a pilot study (e.g. “You were very responsive,” “You need to ask more questions.” Then, they were instructed to give their partner feedback (advice) on their conversation style by selecting comments from this list (participants could choose as many comments as they liked).

We rated the comments using the same procedures in Study 3A ($N = 160$; 45.6% female; 8.32 raters per comment, $SD = 1.15$). In addition to the criticality and actionability ratings, raters also indicated the overall specificity of the comment by responding to the statement “When compared to the average comment, how vague or specific are the points made in the comment above?” on a scale of 1 (very vague) to 6 (very specific). We also measured advice or feedback giver criticality by calculating the proportion of critical points (i.e. $\frac{\# \text{ criticism}}{\# \text{ criticism} + \# \text{ praise}}$). they selected from the list of potential comments they were provided.

Results

Replicating our findings from our main studies, participants who were asked to give advice provided more critical comments ($M = 0.26$, $SE = 0.02$) than those asked to give feedback ($M = 0.19$, $SE = 0.02$), $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.10], $p < .001$. Advice givers also selected a higher proportion of critical comments from the list they were shown ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.32$) than feedback givers ($M = 0.09$, $SD = 0.25$), $t(179.27) = 2.41$, $p = .017$, $d = 0.35$.

Participants who were asked to give advice provided a greater number of suggestions ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 1.29$, $SE_{\text{Advice}} = 0.35$; $M_{\text{Feedback}} = 0.77$, $SE_{\text{Feedback}} = 0.35$), $b = 0.52$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.77], $p < .001$, and their comments were rated as more actionable ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 2.32$, $SE_{\text{Advice}} = 0.07$; $M_{\text{Feedback}} = 1.84$, $SE_{\text{Feedback}} = 0.07$), $b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.39, 0.57], $p < .001$. Advice was also rated as more specific ($M = 3.29$, $SE = 0.09$) than feedback ($M = 2.86$, $SE = 0.09$), $b = 0.42$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.55], $p < .001$.

Discussion

In this supplemental study we replicated our findings from Study 3A with an interpersonal task in which the comment writer and recipient are known to one another. In addition, we found that framing one’s comments as advice (versus feedback) impacts the selection of critical input, independent from its generation.

Supplementary Study D: Giving Advice vs. Feedback vs. Developmental Feedback

In this preregistered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=jz62a5>) supplementary study, we sought to replicate the effect of soliciting advice versus feedback on the developmental nature, criticality, and actionability of the comments generated, and also compare these effects to a different control condition: soliciting “developmental feedback.” Although seekers do not seem likely to frame their requests as “developmental feedback” in the real world (no participant used the phrase “developmental feedback” in our input seeking studies, Study 2), we included this condition because prior literature has previously referred to improvement-oriented information as “developmental feedback.” (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011; Zhou, 2003). We predicted that soliciting “advice” would also generate more developmental, critical, and actionable input than soliciting “developmental feedback.”

Participants and Procedure

802 full time employees from Amazon Mechanical Turk read the job application cover letter from Study 3A, and were randomly assigned to “give the writer your [feedback / advice / developmental feedback]” using an open-response format. As per our preregistration, 185 participants who did not complete the task (e.g. invited the cover letter writer for an interview rather than providing input on the cover letter) were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 617 full time employees (43.11% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.03$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.90$). The developmental nature, criticality, actionability of the comments were assessed by 494 independent raters (58.8% female; 6.40 raters per comment, $SD = 1.34$) using the comment coding procedures outlined in Section 6.

Results and Discussion

Across all of our four dependent variables, “advice” was significantly and consistently rated highest, followed by “developmental feedback,” which itself was rated significantly higher than “feedback.”

Input providers offered more developmental input when the request was framed as “advice” ($M = 0.48$, $SE = 0.04$) rather than “feedback” ($M = -0.31$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.79$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.68, 0.90], $p < .001$ or “developmental feedback” ($M = 0.04$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.55], $p < .001$. Framing the request as “developmental feedback,” however, yielded input evaluated as more developmental compared to requesting “feedback”, $b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.46], $p < .001$.

Requests for “advice” also yielded comments that were more critical ($M = 0.60$, $SE = 0.02$) than requests for “feedback” ($M = 0.49$, $SE = 0.02$), $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.16], $p < .001$, or “developmental feedback” ($M = 0.54$, $SE = 0.02$), $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.11], $p < .001$. “Developmental feedback” was also more critical than “feedback,” $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.10], $p = .008$.

Requests for “advice” yielded more suggestions ($M = 1.63$, $SE = 0.03$) compared to requests for “feedback” ($M = 1.00$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.63$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.54, 0.72], $p < .001$, or “developmental feedback” ($M = 1.27$, $SE = 0.04$), $b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.45], $p < .001$. “Developmental feedback” yielded more suggestions than “feedback,” $b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.36], $p < .001$.

The composite measure of perceived actionability ($\alpha = 0.97$) yielded similar results ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 3.20$, $SE = 0.04$; $M_{\text{Feedback}} = 2.64$, $SE = 0.04$; $b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.66], $p < .001$; $M_{\text{DevelopmentalFeedback}} = 2.87$, $SE = 0.04$; $b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.42], $p < .001$). “Developmental feedback” was perceived as more actionable than “feedback,” $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.34], $p < .001$.

Taken together, these findings suggest that framing the request as “advice,” rather than as “feedback” or “developmental feedback” is most likely to yield the developmental, critical, and actionable input that feedback seekers desire.

**Supplementary Analysis A:
Exploratory Emotional Investment Measures (Study 3A)**

In addition to measuring the input provider’s future focus, we included various exploratory measures to investigate whether framing a request for input as asking for “advice,” “feedback,” or “thoughts” impacted the giver’s emotional investment in the recipient’s development (as measured by items described in Table 1). We found only one significant difference between the advice and feedback conditions for these emotional investment measures; those asked for advice were willing to wait longer for the recipient to revise their work before providing additional input (see Table 2).

Table 1: Measures of Emotional Investment

Construct	Measure
	In today's study, you were asked to provide your [advice/feedback/thoughts] to the writer.
	Thinking about your mindset while providing your [advice/feedback/thoughts] to the writer, how much do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Not at all; 7 = A great deal)
Responsibility	- I am responsible for the quality of the writer's letter
Desire for Improvement	- If the writer failed to improve their letter, I would feel unhappy
Desire for High Performance	- I really want the writer to do well
Wait Time	Imagine your [advice/feedback/thoughts] was just delivered to the writer. The writer will revise their letter based on your [advice/feedback/thoughts].
	Would you be willing to wait for the writer to revise the letter to provide further [advice/feedback/thoughts] on this revised letter? If so, how long would you be willing to wait? Please indicate 0 if you are not willing to wait to review the revised letter. I would be willing to wait for up to ___ minutes to review the letter that is revised based on my [advice/feedback/thoughts]. (slider scale ranging from 0-30)
Interaction Time	The [advice/feedback/thoughts] you provided today will be delivered to the writer of the application letter. If the writer wishes to chat about your [advice/feedback/thoughts], how much time (in minutes) would you be willing to spend connecting with them? If you do not wish to connect with the author, please indicate 0. (slider scale ranging from 0-20)
Review Time	Imagine that you were invited to a follow-up study. Further imagine that you were given 10 minutes to work on the following activities: - Review the application letter the writer revised based on your [advice/feedback/thoughts] - Review an application letter written by a different writer - Read and summarize scientific articles on your own
	Using the slider scales below, please indicate how many minutes you would like to spend on each of these activities. If you do not want to spend any time on any of the activities, please indicate 0 for that activity. The number of minutes must add up to 10.

(slider scale ranging from 0-10; constant sum question)

Analyzed time allocated to reviewing the recipient's revised letter

Table 2: Results

	Feedback	Advice	<i>d</i> _{advice vs. feedback}	Thoughts	<i>d</i> _{advice vs. thoughts}	<i>d</i> _{feedback vs. thoughts}
Responsibility	2.93 (1.80)	3.15 (1.87)	0.12	2.79 (1.81)	0.19	0.08
Desire for Improvement	3.78 (1.68)	4.10 (1.88)	0.18	3.78 (1.76)	0.17	-0.004
Desire for High Performance	5.31 (1.45)	5.55 (1.36)	0.17	5.20 (1.53)	0.24*	0.08
Wait Time	12.23 (9.68)	15.09 (9.98)	0.29**	13.71 (9.49)	0.14	0.15
Interaction Time	6.73 (5.50)	7.90 (5.99)	0.20	8.06 (5.62)	-0.03	-0.24
Review Time	4.06 (1.89)	4.47 (1.97)	0.21	4.04 (1.93)	0.22	0.007

Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

d: difference across conditions; *p*-value adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Tukey's method

**Supplementary Analysis B:
Exploratory Alternative Mechanism Measures (Study 3B)**

In addition to measuring the input provider’s future focus, we included various exploratory measures to investigate whether framing a request for input as asking for “advice” or “feedback” impacted the giver’s mindset in other ways (as measured by items described in Table 3). We found no significant difference in any of these emotional investment measures (see Table 4).

Table 3: Measures of Emotional Investment

Construct	Measure
Moral Self Regard	When giving this [advice / feedback] to [the recipient], I felt... - moral - generous - cooperative - reliable - trustworthy - loyal to others - caring - respectful - helpful - dependable (1 = Not at all; 7 = A great deal)
Opportunity to Improve	- I think [the recipient] will have the opportunity to act on my [advice/feedback] in the future. - I think [the recipient] will act on my [advice/feedback] in the future. (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)
Positive and Negative Affect	This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Indicate to what extent you felt this way while giving [the recipient] your [advice/feedback]. (Adapted from Watson et al. 1988)

Table 4: Results

	Feedback	Advice	<i>d</i>
Moral Self Regard ($\alpha = 0.94$)	5.43 (1.14)	5.55 (1.11)	0.11
Opportunity to Improve ($\alpha = 0.70$)	5.66 (1.01)	5.67 (1.18)	0.00
Positive Affect	39.52 (6.58)	40.77 (5.70)	0.20
Negative Affect	29.88 (12.60)	31.66 (13.35)	0.13

Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

d: difference across conditions; *p*-value adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Tukey’s method

**Supplementary Analysis C:
Study 3B Results Controlling for Work Situation**

The table below reports the results from Study 3B controlling for the characteristics of the work situation participants recorded.

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable				
	Developmental Nature	Criticality Ratio	# Suggestions	Actionability	Usefulness
Advice Condition	0.744***	0.121***	0.556***	0.459***	0.278***
Closeness	0.093***	0.004	0.059**	0.021	0.022
Relative Rank	0.104**	-0.005	0.018	0.075**	0.052*
Performance Quality	-0.180***	-0.096***	-0.153***	-0.125***	-0.074***
Provider Age	-0.001	-0.002 [†]	0.007*	0.001	0.002
Provider Female	0.154*	-0.018	0.072	0.076	0.127*
Constant	0.756***	0.968***	1.865***	3.741***	3.443***

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Results are outputs from hierarchical linear models (HLM) with rater random intercepts.

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