Feedback acceptance in developmental assessment centers: the role of feedback message, participant personality, and affective response to the feedback session

SUZANNE T. BELL1* AND WINFRED ARTHUR JR.2

1Department of Psychology, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
2Department of Psychology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, U.S.A.

Summary
We investigated feedback acceptance by participants (N = 141) in an operational developmental assessment center (AC). Consistent with predictions based on self-enhancement theory and the Affective Infusion Model, results indicated that higher assessor ratings were associated with higher feedback acceptance, and this relationship was partially mediated by the participant’s affective reaction to the feedback session. Participants’ self-ratings of their AC performance did not affect this relationship suggesting no support for our prediction based on self-verification theory. We also investigated the role of participants’ self-ratings of agreeableness, extraversion, and emotional stability in feedback acceptance by testing specific moderated mediation hypotheses. Extraversion was related to feedback acceptance through the affective reaction to the feedback session. Agreeableness moderated the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance relationship such that there was a strong relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance for highly agreeable participants, but no relationship for low agreeable individuals. For low agreeable individuals, there was a positive direct relationship between the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance which was not observed for highly agreeable individuals. The hypothesized role of emotional stability in predicting feedback acceptance was not supported. Implications for the delivery of feedback in developmental ACs are discussed in light of these findings. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction
Feedback interventions are actions taken by an external agent to provide information regarding some aspect of an individual’s task performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Feedback is central to several organizational interventions including individual assessments, 360-degree assessments, and performance appraisals. Although feedback does not always successfully do so (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), organizations deliver feedback to employees with the ultimate goal of guiding future behavior.
The acceptance of feedback has been noted as a core psychological process underlying feedback in organizations (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Ilgen et al. (1979) defined feedback acceptance as “the recipient’s belief that the feedback is an accurate portrayal of his or her performance” (p. 356). Researchers agree that before feedback can be used it must be accepted and internalized (Ashford, 1986), and as result of its theoretical importance, feedback acceptance has received extensive empirical attention (e.g., Brett & Atwater, 2001; Ryan, Brutus, Greguras, & Hakel, 2000; Stone & Stone, 1984).

In the present study, we examine feedback acceptance in developmental assessment centers (ACs). ACs are a selection and training methodology that consist of participants working through a series of behavioral exercises during which they are observed and rated by trained assessors on particular dimensions such as team building or organization and planning. Since their inception into industry, ACs have gained support through both experimental and applied applications. The increased use of ACs has been characterized by a shift from selection to developmental purposes (Thornton & Byham, 1982) with 40 per cent having the objective of developmental planning (Spychalski, Quinones, Gaugler, & Pohley, 1997). This shift is coupled with the increased importance for participants to develop or to learn from the experience. In developmental ACs, feedback is provided to participants during a feedback session with an assessor and/or via a feedback report. The feedback focuses on performance in the AC along with strategies for improvement on the AC dimensions. The developmental AC methodology is predicated on the assumption that providing individuals with information about their weaknesses will result in developmental activities on their part to improve.

It is because the individual determines the value and the application of the feedback that feedback acceptance is particularly critical for developmental feedback interventions such as developmental ACs. The emphasis on development is in contrast with feedback delivered as part of the performance appraisal process. Performance appraisals are specifically tied to administrative outcomes of interest (e.g., raises, continued employment, promotions). When performance appraisal feedback is given to an employee, the individual might modify future work behaviors and try to improve (in order to gain the outcomes of interest) without necessarily agreeing that the appraisal is accurate. Developmental ACs (and other interventions such as individual assessments) are designed to guide self-improvement more broadly (Ryan et al., 2000). In developmental ACs, participants must buy-in to the AC performance feedback and want to improve their deficient areas. If participants think the feedback is inaccurate, then from their perspective it would be illogical to increase effort or change their behaviors to achieve a certain standard. If a participant dismisses the performance feedback in developmental ACs, then a major objective of the AC is compromised. With the high costs per candidate associated with the AC process (\( M = $1730, SD = $5192 \) per participant; Spychalski et al., 1997), research that can lead to a better understanding of feedback acceptance in developmental ACs is of both applied and scientific value.

Not only is feedback acceptance of increased importance in developmental interventions, but developmental ACs provide a unique feedback context because of the use of a feedback session. In most ACs (70.5 per cent), participants receive oral feedback about their performance and strategies for improvement during a feedback session (Spychalski et al., 1997). These sessions are typically conducted by trained AC staff and last about an hour (\( M = 64.2 \) minutes; SD = 37.2 minutes; Spychalski et al., 1997). These sessions are also frequently followed up with written reports about the participant’s performance. Thus, the initial mode of feedback delivery is the feedback session which involves the communication of a message (i.e., feedback on the AC dimensions and strategies for improvement) between a source (i.e., AC assessor or staff) and a recipient (i.e., the AC participant). Contextual variability and factors such as delivery style may be less of a factor in developmental situations such as ACs since the feedback context is highly standardized and the feedback providers have typically undergone extensive training (Ryan et al., 2000). The extensive training and
standardization of the process is thought to reduce the variability in context and feedback behavior of the providers.

Despite the importance of feedback acceptance in developmental interventions and the unique feedback context of developmental ACs, research has been limited. We seek to contribute to the literature by investigating variables related to feedback acceptance in a developmental AC. Given the delivery of feedback during a feedback session, we examine the role of the affective reaction to the feedback session in mediating the relationship between the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance. We also explore potential moderators of this mediated relationship. Specifically, given the standardization of the AC context, we focus on variables related to the participants’ frame of reference (including participants’ self-ratings of their AC performance, and participant personality characteristics of extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness) as moderators of the relationships between assessor ratings, affective reaction to the feedback session, and feedback acceptance. We develop moderated mediation hypotheses between these variables based on self-enhancement theory, self-verification theory, and the Affect Infusion Model, and draw on related empirical research (e.g., reactions to 360 degree feedback; Atwater & Brett, 2005). The specific background for the moderated mediation hypotheses is detailed below.

Assessor ratings and feedback acceptance

A consistent finding in the literature is that positive feedback is rated as more accurate than negative feedback (e.g., Brett & Atwater, 2001; Halperin, Snyder, Shenkel, & Houston, 1976; Stone & Stone, 1985). Compared to negative feedback, positive feedback has been rated as more credible, more desirable, and as having greater impact (Jacobs, Jacobs, Feldman, & Cavior, 1973). This penchant for positive feedback may be particularly problematic for feedback acceptance in work settings. In ACs, assessor ratings and participant self-ratings have shown significantly different means along with low correlations on all dimensions (Clapham, 1998). Participant self-ratings are generally higher and have smaller standard deviations than assessor ratings suggesting more leniency and less variability for self-ratings. This is consistent with the performance appraisal research literature that also indicates self-ratings are more lenient and less variable than supervisor ratings (Anderson, Warner, & Spencer, 1984; Fox, Caspy, & Reisler, 1994; Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988; Schrader & Steiner, 1996).

There have been two theoretical explanations for why individuals tend to be more accepting of positive feedback: self-verification theory (Swann, 1987) and self-enhancement theory (Shrauger, 1975). Self-verification theory suggests that individuals behave and think in ways that perpetuate their self-view because it helps to make their world predictable and controllable. In terms of a feedback message, individuals may perceive feedback as less accurate if it does not fit with their self-view of how they performed. Because individuals generally view themselves positively, they are more likely to accept positive feedback, but according to self-verification theory they do so because it is consistent with their self-image. On the other hand, self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals are motivated to increase their feelings of personal worth. Self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals prefer favorable information, regardless of their self-image. The two theories would both predict the same result for individuals with positive self-views; these individuals should be more likely to accept positive feedback. However, the theories would suggest different predictions for those individuals with a negative self-view (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals with a negative self-view are more likely to accept positive feedback, whereas self-verification theory suggests that individuals with a negative self-view are more likely to accept negative feedback.
Researchers have worked to reconcile predictions of self-verification and self-enhancement theories. First, there is some indication that individuals are motivated to both self-enhance and self-verify when possible. Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) found that participants were more likely to seek feedback on their best attributes rather than their worst attributes. In developmental ACs, individuals have less control over what feedback they receive because participants receive information on all AC dimensions. Second, Swann et al. (1987) reconcile the predictions made by the two theories by suggesting that self-verification affects cognitive outcomes and self-enhancement affects affective outcomes. As predicted, individuals with a positive self-view who received positive feedback perceived it to be more accurate than negative feedback. Individuals with a negative self-view rated negative feedback as more accurate than positive feedback. However, both individuals with a positive self-view and individuals with a negative self-view had more positive affect to positive feedback.

The implications are that AC participants should view assessor ratings that are more consistent with their self-ratings of performance as more accurate and that higher assessor ratings should be related to positive affective reactions of the AC participant. However, because feedback is typically delivered during a 1-hour feedback session, developmental ACs may be a particular situation in which affective reactions also play an important role in rating the feedback as accurate (i.e., feedback acceptance). First, in a feedback session, an individual is expected to both react to and understand feedback within the session. Swann (1990) suggests that the mental processes are different for self-verification and self-enhancement. Both theories suggest that individuals categorize self-relevant feedback as favorable or unfavorable (e.g., is the feedback good news or bad news?). This initial reaction should be enough for individuals to self-enhance. Self-verification on the other hand, requires additional information beyond the initial reaction to the information; it requires a comparison between the feedback and the individual’s self-concept. Both processing capabilities and motivation are thought to influence the extent to which an individual will engage in self-verification (Swann & Schroeder, 1995). Consistent with this, depriving individuals of cognitive resources reduces the tendency for individuals to self-verify. Because participants have to process and react to new information during the feedback session, a participant may only have time to categorize the assessor ratings as favorable or unfavorable. The affective reaction to the feedback session may ultimately be related to feedback acceptance in developmental ACs.

Affective reactions to the feedback session as a mediator

In his Affective Infusion Model (AIM), Forgas (1995) outlined when and how affectively loaded information will influence judgmental outcomes. He suggests that affect can influence both the processing choices individuals make and what information individuals focus on. For example, functional explanations suggest that a good mood informs individuals that the situation is favorable and little additional information is needed; a bad mood suggests that something threatening is occurring and individuals may need to be more vigilant in their understanding of the situation. When individuals have positive moods they use a more internally driven, flexible, and generative thinking style. When individuals have negative moods they use a more externally driven and systematic thinking style (Forgas, 1995). Thus, if individuals have a positive affective reaction to the feedback session, they are likely to process the assessor ratings with less veracity, attribute the information to themselves (i.e., make internal attributions) and be more likely to accept the feedback message. Lower assessor ratings are likely to create a negative affective reaction to the feedback session and participants will use a more thorough processing style, increasing the likeliness that they will no longer accept the feedback information.
We propose a moderated mediation between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance as summarized in Figure 1a. Assessor ratings should be related to feedback acceptance through the affective reaction to the feedback session. We hypothesize a mediated relationship because self-enhancement theory would suggest a relationship between assessor ratings and the affective reaction.
reaction to the feedback session, and AIM would suggest a relationship between the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance. Thus,

**Hypothesis 1:** The relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance will be mediated by the affective reaction to the feedback session.

Although we expect the affective reaction to the feedback session to mediate the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship, we expect this to be a partial mediation. Thus, there also may be a direct relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance. Self-verification theory would suggest that participant self-views would interact with the assessor ratings to affect cognitive outcomes (i.e., feedback acceptance). Specifically, participants with higher self-ratings of their AC performance will be more accepting of higher assessor ratings and participants with lower self-ratings will be more accepting of lower assessor ratings because it fits with their self-image. Thus,

**Hypothesis 2:** Participant self-ratings will moderate the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance such that there will be a positive relationship for individuals with high self-ratings and a negative relationship for individuals with low self-ratings.

### Participant personality variables as moderators

Given the hypothesized role of the affective reaction to the feedback session in the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship, we investigated personality variables related to social interaction and emotion regulation (i.e., extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness) that might moderate the relationships suggested in the mediated model. Major feedback theories have suggested that participant personality characteristics influence reactions to feedback. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) posit that personality variables play a role in how feedback recipients will eliminate the feedback-standard gap or the dissonance between perceived performance and received feedback. Ilgen et al. (1979) also indicate that personality variables can affect feedback acceptance. They argue that individuals judge their own performance and therefore, serve as a source of feedback. How feedback is perceived is affected by personality variables because recipients view feedback in the context of an individual frame of reference. Despite the theoretical appeal of personality variables influencing feedback acceptance, empirical support has been limited (e.g., Atwater & Brett, 2005). We hope to advance the understanding of the relationship between personality variables and feedback acceptance by examining complex moderated mediation hypotheses and by focusing on Five Factor Model (FFM) personality variables (i.e., extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness) that have to do with social interaction and emotional regulation. We believe that these variables will influence feedback acceptance in developmental ACs because of the importance of the affective reaction to the feedback session in mediating the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship. Previous research has found no support for conscientiousness or openness to experience predicting affective reactions to feedback (Anderson & Jones, 2000; Atwater & Brett, 2005) and thus, conscientiousness and openness to experience were not included in the present study. Our focus on the specified personality variables is of value because assessors may be able to use a better understanding of the relationships between participants’ personality variables and feedback acceptance to tailor the feedback session and achieve maximal acceptance of developmental information.

Individuals high in extraversion can be described as sociable, gregarious, assertive, and active. We propose that extraversion will be related to feedback acceptance because extraverted individuals will be more likely to have a positive reaction to the feedback session. Extraverted individuals have a
preference for interacting with others and are especially confident and adept in tasks requiring social interaction. For example, extraversion has been positively related to feedback seeking during the socialization process for new employees (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). The feedback session of the AC may be considered a social interaction and extraverted individuals may be more skillful in this social interaction. They may ask more questions and clarify the feedback they are given during the feedback session, thus generating a more positive affective reaction to the feedback session, ultimately increasing feedback acceptance. Extraverted individuals may also have a positive reaction to the feedback session because of their characteristic enjoyment of social situations.

Further, extraversion is thought to represent a predisposition to experience positive affect (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; Rustling & Larsen, 1997). Extraverted individuals tend to pay attention to positive information which translates into positive affect and satisfaction with their life (Noguchi, Gohm, & Dalsky, 2006). Thus, extraverted AC participants may also selectively attend to positive aspects of the feedback message, increasing the likelihood that they will be more accepting of the feedback. Finally, extraversion is also thought to be related to mood maintenance. Research indicates that extraverts are able to engage in mood maintenance after encountering ambiguous stimuli (Lischetzke & Eid, 2006). After watching an affectively ambivalent movie, extraverted individuals were more likely to report positive affect compared to introverted individuals, even though there were no affective distinctions between extraverted and introverted individuals before the movie (Lischetzke & Eid, 2006). Hence, extraverted participants might be more likely to interpret the assessor ratings in a positive light, and have an increased positive affective reaction to the feedback session.

In sum, extraversion is related to positive affective reactions. Extraversion should be related to feedback acceptance to the extent that feedback acceptance is related to the affective reaction to the feedback session. Specifically, because of a predisposition to experience positive affect and their ability to engage in mood maintenance, extraverted individuals will be more likely to have a positive affective reaction to the feedback session regardless of the feedback message. For introverted participants, there may be a stronger relationship between the feedback message and the affective reaction to the feedback session. Thus, we hypothesize a moderated mediation as summarized in Figure 1b.

**Hypothesis 3**: Extraversion will moderate the relationship between assessor ratings and the affective reaction to the feedback session such that the relationship will be stronger for individuals low on extraversion and weaker for individuals high on extraversion.

Another personality variable that may be related to feedback acceptance is emotional stability. Low emotional stability-neurotic individuals have been described as depressed, angry, insecure, emotional, and worried. Research has suggested that emotional stability represents a predisposition to experience negative affect (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; Rustling & Larsen, 1997). Participants reported more negative affect when they were asked to act in a neurotic as opposed to emotionally stable manner (McNiel & Fleeson, 2006). In addition, neurotic individuals are thought to have negative affect more frequently partly because they pay attention to negative information (Noguchi et al., 2006). It may be that regardless of the feedback message, individuals low in emotional stability will focus on any negative aspects of the feedback message and be less likely to have a positive affective reaction to the feedback session. Individuals low in emotional stability may perceive any feedback message as more of a personal attack than constructive criticism and therefore, may develop negative affective reactions to the feedback session. Trending toward this, Atwater and Brett (2005) found that emotional stability added a small amount of variance (Δ$R^2 = .02$, $p < .10$) in predicting negative emotions after feedback ratings were accounted for, such that participants who were lower in emotional stability had more negative emotions following feedback regardless of the
ratings they received. Thus, to the extent that the affective reaction to the feedback session is related to feedback acceptance, emotional stability may be related to feedback acceptance. Individuals low in emotional stability will be more likely to have a less positive affective reaction to the feedback session regardless of the feedback message. For emotionally stable participants there may be a stronger relationship between the feedback message and affective reactions to the feedback session. Thus, we hypothesize a moderated mediation as summarized in Figure 1b.

**Hypothesis 4**: Emotional Stability will moderate the relationship between assessor ratings and the affective reaction to the feedback session such that the relationship will be stronger for individuals high on emotional stability and weaker for individuals low on emotional stability.

Finally, agreeableness is associated with good-natured, flexible, trusting, cooperative, and tolerant dispositions. The relationship between affective response to the feedback session and feedback acceptance may be stronger for highly agreeable individuals and weaker for low agreeable individuals for two reasons. First, agreeable individuals seek to control negative emotions in the presence of others (Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinary, 2000; Tobin & Graziano, 2006). So, it is likely that even if highly agreeable individuals are receiving negative information, they will not publicly express negative emotion toward the feedback message during the feedback session. An assessor may mistake the agreeable participant’s positive response during the feedback session as acceptance of the feedback message and may not elaborate as they would if an individual reacted negatively to the feedback. This may result in an affective reaction to the feedback session (reported in private) that is strongly related to feedback acceptance for highly agreeable individuals. The low agreeable individuals may make their distaste for the lower ratings apparent during the session and the assessor may work harder to get buy-in from the recipient. This could result in a low agreeable individual having a negative affective reaction to the feedback session but ultimately accepting the feedback, suggesting a weak relationship between the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance. Related to this, agreeableness has also been linked to effortful control (Rothbart & Ahadi, 1994). If highly agreeable individuals are using resources to control their affective reactions during the feedback session, they will be less likely to focus on and process any additional information that could be helpful in accepting the feedback. The low agreeable individuals might not spend resources controlling their affective reaction to the feedback session and would instead spend the resources on further evaluating and understanding the feedback information. Thus, a relationship between a negative affective reaction to the feedback session (reported privately) and the rejection of feedback may be even stronger for highly agreeable individuals and weaker for low agreeableness individuals.

Second, individuals high in agreeableness may avoid social conflict and strive to maintain positive relationships with others (Bernardin, Cooke, & Villanova, 2000; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001). There is some indication that agreeableness is related to the suppression of negative attitudes toward others. If there is a justification to remove the suppression, high agreeableness individuals may no longer act in prosocial ways (Graziano, Bruce, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007). Receiving feedback that could be perceived as “rude” and “unkind” might be just such an event in which case agreeableness might moderate the link between the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance. If highly agreeable individuals perceive the feedback session to be a positive interaction, they may wish to maintain cooperative and prosocial interactions by accepting the assessor’s evaluation. For low agreeableness individuals, feedback acceptance may be less motivated by the positive affective response to the feedback session. If highly agreeable individuals perceive the feedback session as a negative interaction, they may no longer be cooperative with the process and may reject the feedback message. The direct translation between the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance may not hold true for low agreeable individual as they are less
motivated to maintain cooperative and prosocial interactions. For low agreeable individuals, having a positive affective response to the feedback may not influence their judgments of the feedback accuracy. Thus, we hypothesize a moderated mediation as summarized in Figure 1c.

Hypothesis 5: Agreeableness will moderate the relationship between the affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance such that the relationship will be stronger for individuals high on agreeableness and weaker for individuals low on agreeableness.

Organizational Context

Data were collected from six administrations of an operational, developmental AC between the years 1997 and 2001. Two organizations participated in the AC. The first was a state agency whose primary responsibly was conducting audits of other state agencies and offices. The AC was part of a career development program intended to help mid-level managers develop their leadership skills. Participation in the AC was not required but all of the managers were invited to participate and they all did. The second organization was a professional school of public administration which was training individuals for leadership and managerial positions in government or public service. Incoming students were required to participate in the AC. The AC was part of a larger developmental program designed to increase participants’ effectiveness on several dimensions of leadership. The administration of the AC lasted approximately two and a half days and was administered onsite at both locations. The AC provided evaluations of five behavioral dimensions—communication, influencing others, organizing-and-planning, problem solving, and team building—measured with three exercises. The exercises were (1) a competitive resource allocation exercise (leaderless group discussion); (2) an in-basket exercise followed by an interview to answer questions concerning the in-basket (the in-basket interview was used to obtain communication scores for this exercise); and (3) a non-competitive management problems exercise (another leaderless group discussion).

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 141 participants (managers in a state agency \( N = 31 \); students enrolled in a public administration graduate program \( N = 110 \); men \( N = 66 \); women \( N = 75 \)). Preliminary analyses indicated no significant differences on the dependent variables (e.g., affective reaction and feedback acceptance) between participants from the two organizations or between the sexes, so neither organization nor sex was used as a covariate in the subsequent analyses. Because of missing data on some variables, the sample sizes for the analyses ranged from 124 to 141. Sample size or degrees of freedom are reported for each of the analyses in the tables. Post hoc analyses to compute achieved
power were conducted using G*Power 3.0 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Power analyses were conducted on the smallest observed effect size for the regressions ($R^2 = .11$, $k = 3$, $p = .05$) and indicated that the sample ($N = 124$) had the statistical power of .91 to detect the effect size, indicating adequate power for the analyses presented.

Assessors

A total of 35 different assessors (18 men and 17 women) were used across the six administrations. Assessors had their Ph.D. in industrial/organization (I/O) psychology or were advanced students in an I/O psychology doctoral program. All assessors participated in a 2-day frame-of-reference-based training program prior to the AC. The participant-to-assessor ratio for each administration of the AC was either 1:1 or 2:1.

Procedure

Each AC candidate participated in all three AC exercises and was evaluated on the five leadership dimensions. Assessors were divided into groups of three or four and each group was assigned to observe and rate the materials (from the in-basket exercise) for a specific group of four to six participants. Within each assessor group, an assessor was designated as the primary assessor for a specific participant which meant he or she would deliver the feedback during the feedback session. For the group exercises (i.e., competitive resource allocation and noncompetitive management problems), the group of assessors sat in the rear of the room and recorded the behaviors displayed by the group of four to six participants. Each assessor observed and recorded the behavior of one or two AC participants in the group. Each assessor was assigned to observe specific but different participants in each exercise; however, all assessors in the group were present during each group exercise. Upon completion of each exercise, assessors categorized their recorded observations into dimensions using materials which described each dimension in detail and listed some representative behaviors. For the in-basket exercise (including the follow-up in-basket interview), assessors reviewed and rated the materials for each participant to whom they were assigned.

Following the completion of all exercises, the assessor group met in a consensus meeting to rate the participants’ behaviors. The consensus meeting involved the following. For each participant, each assessor first provided an initial dimension rating for each exercise (e.g., a rating on oral communication for the competitive resource allocation exercise). When an assessor in the group had not been assigned to record the behaviors of the participant being discussed, the initial dimension by exercise rating was based on the assessor’s own observations as well as a verbatim listing of observed behaviors recorded by the assessor assigned to the participant for the particular exercise. Next, assessors indicated an initial dimension rating across all exercises (e.g., a rating for oral communication displayed in the AC) for each participant. The assessors discussed the dimension ratings of the participant until the assessors reached consensus. The consensus resulted in the final dimension rating. On the day following the conclusion of the AC exercises, the primary assessor met with the participant for a 1-hour feedback session to discuss the behavioral assessment and strategies for improvement on each dimension. Although the primary assessor delivered the feedback, the performance feedback and the improvement strategies were based on the ratings agreed upon by the group of the assessors during the consensus meetings. These dimension-level consensus ratings (i.e., assessor ratings) were used to operationalize the feedback message in this study. Arthur, Woehr, and Maldegen (2000) report convergent and discriminant validity for other ACs that were designed and implemented using the same procedures reported here.
Although ratings were obtained at the dimension level, consistent with other feedback literature (e.g., Atwater & Brett, 2005; Smither, London, & Richmond, 2005), we chose to collapse (i.e., take the average) across AC dimensions to operationalize participant self-ratings and assessor ratings (cf. Arthur, Day, McNelly, & Edens, 2003). This decision was based on several reasons. First, there were high correlations across dimensions. Specifically, scale reliabilities across dimensions were $\alpha = .68$ and $\alpha = .80$ for the participant self-ratings and assessor ratings, respectively. Second, our interest in feedback acceptance and the affective reaction to the feedback session was at the level of the AC. Thus, there was no expectation that AC dimensions would theoretically be differentially related to performance feedback acceptance.

**Measures**

**Participant self-ratings of their AC performance (i.e., participant self-ratings)***
The Leadership Behavior Assessment Instrument (LBAI) was designed for this AC and was used to obtain the participants’ self-ratings of their performance at the completion of the AC. A detailed definition was presented for each of the five AC dimensions assessed, and participants provided a single rating of their effectiveness on each dimension using a 5-point scale (1 = very ineffective/ unsuccessful; 5 = very effective/successful). The average of the five dimension ratings was used as the participant’s self-rating.

**Goldberg’s 100 unipolar markers***
Goldberg’s 100 Unipolar Markers (Goldberg, 1992) is a standard measure of the dimensions of the FFM of personality. This measure was used to operationalize participants’ extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness. Participants rated a list of 100 common human traits in terms of how accurately the traits described themselves using a 9-point scale (1 = extremely inaccurate; 9 = extremely accurate). Each dimension of the FFM was measured by 20 items and participants’ scores on each of the factors was the sum of their ratings on the 20 items that represented that factor after the appropriate items were reverse-scored. Participants were given the measure as part of a package to be completed during the AC. It should be noted that Goldberg specifically uses the label surgency to describe extraversion as operationalized by his instrument. To be consistent with the more commonly used factor labels, surgency is referred to as extraversion in the present study. Internal consistency estimates for the three dimensions were .93 for extraversion, .89 for emotional stability, and .91 for agreeableness.

**Affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance***
The Feedback Evaluation Questionnaire (FEQ) was designed for this AC to assess participants’ perceptions of the feedback delivered during the feedback session. The FEQ was given in an envelope to participants at the close of the feedback session. Participants were asked to fill out and return the measure to the AC coordinator at their earliest convenience. Six questions on the FEQ pertained to the affective reaction of the participant to the feedback session. Participants were asked to indicate, using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with statements about the feedback session (i.e., “the feedback session was... warm, pleasant, friendly, comfortable, relaxed, and enjoyable”). The internal consistency estimate for ratings on the six items was .88.

Consistent with Ilgen et al.’s (1979) definition of feedback acceptance, we operationalized feedback acceptance with three questions that directly assessed participants’ reactions to the accuracy of their performance feedback. Participants were asked to indicate, using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree;
5 = strongly agree), the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with statements about their AC performance feedback (i.e., “the observations of my performance in the developmental center were accurate.”; “the feedback I received from the developmental center was accurate.”; “the feedback I received adequately captured my performance in the developmental center.”). The internal consistency estimate for ratings on the three items was .86. The nine items of the FEQ mentioned above were factor analyzed; results indicated that items loaded onto the factors as expected and supported two clear factors (i.e., affective reaction to the feedback session and accuracy of feedback).

**Analyses**

Because we intended to test for interactions, all predictor variables were mean-centered as recommended by Aiken and West (1991) to reduce multicolinearity. Hypotheses 2–5 each proposed moderated mediation between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance with the affective reaction to the feedback session as the mediator and participant self-ratings, extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness as potential moderators (as summarized in Figure 1a–c). To examine Hypotheses 2–5, methods for testing moderated mediation outlined by Edwards and Lambert (2007) were used. Edwards and Lambert outline deficiencies with previous approaches (e.g., moderated causal steps approach) used to test combinations of moderation and mediation, and present an approach that integrates moderation analyses and path models. Mediation is expressed in terms of direct, indirect, and total effects and these paths are tested to the extent that they vary across levels of a moderator.

We used the total effect moderation model (Figure 2) which tests the overall mediated relationship (i.e., assessor ratings, affective reaction, and feedback acceptance), as well as the potential effect for the moderator of interest (i.e., participant self-ratings, extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness). Although we hypothesized each moderator to have a significant effect on a particular path (see Figure 1a–c), we tested the influence of each moderator on all of the indirect and direct paths.

Figure 2. Total effect moderation model used to test the moderated mediation hypotheses proposed in Hypotheses 2–5
of the mediation model as reflected in Figure 2. In the analyses, each moderator was allowed to influence each of the paths because support for one path can change when terms that represent another path are included in the model. As Edwards and Lambert indicate, “unless moderation is tested for each path, hypotheses concerning the moderating effects of Z are shielded from potentially disconfirming evidence” (p. 6). Thus, for our moderated mediation analyses we included terms that allowed the moderator to influence each of the paths. To test the total effect moderation model, two regressions were estimated:

Affective Reaction = \( b_0 + b_1(\text{Assessor Ratings}) + b_2(\text{Moderator}) + b_3(\text{Assessor Ratings} \times \text{Moderator}) + \varepsilon \)  

Feedback Acceptance = \( b_0 + b_1(\text{Assessor Ratings}) + b_2(\text{Moderator}) + b_3(\text{Assessor Ratings} \times \text{Moderator}) + b_4(\text{Affective Reaction}) + b_5(\text{Affective Reaction} \times \text{Moderator}) + \varepsilon \) 

These regressions were used to generate coefficients for the potential effects of the moderator on the mediated relationship. For any follow-up analyses, reduced form equations, as specified by Edwards and Lambert (2007), were used to calculate simple slopes and examine the form of the moderation. We used the supplemental materials (i.e., Excel spreadsheet) provided by Edwards and Lambert to calculate simple slopes. Because the reduced form equations contain product terms of regression coefficients, the product terms sampling distribution is non-normal. We used a bootstrapping procedure and bias corrected formulas provided by Edwards and Lambert to generate confidence intervals around the coefficient estimates for the product terms (i.e., syntax for CNLR in SPSS and Excel spreadsheet formulas).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 1. As a descriptive summary statement and consistent with the AC and performance appraisal literature, participant self-ratings were more lenient and less variable than the assessor ratings (\( M = 3.87, \ SD = .38; M = 3.21, \ SD = .63, \) respectively; \( d = 1.27 \)) and the two were moderately correlated (\( r = .35, \ p < .01 \)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assessor ratings</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participant self-ratings</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extraversion</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>117.61</td>
<td>23.57</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emotional stability</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>102.76</td>
<td>21.51</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Agreeableness</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>139.09</td>
<td>15.74</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affective reaction</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Feedback acceptance</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01, two-tailed significance tests.
Hypothesis 1 suggested that the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance would be mediated by the affective reaction to the feedback session. Mediation analyses using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) guidelines were used. First, affective reaction was related to assessor ratings ($b = .33, t = 3.90, p < .01$). Second, feedback acceptance was related to assessor ratings ($b = .30, t = 3.60, p < .01$). Finally, feedback acceptance was regressed onto both assessor ratings and affective reaction. In the final equation, the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance was reduced although significant ($b = .19, t = 2.26, p < .05$) when the effect of affective reaction was considered. Sobel’s (1982) test was used to determine the statistical significance of the indirect effect of assessor ratings and feedback acceptance via affective reaction. A significant indirect effect was found suggesting that the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship was at least partially mediated by affective reaction ($z = 2.87, p < .01$). Thus, in support of Hypothesis 1, assessor ratings were positively related to feedback acceptance and this relationship was partially mediated by the affective reaction to the feedback session.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance would be moderated by participant self-ratings. Regression coefficients generated from Equations 1 and 2 with participant self-ratings as the moderator are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Although there was a significant relationship between participant self-ratings and affective reaction ($b = .341, t = 2.34, p < .05$), results suggest that participant self-ratings did not moderate the direct path between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance ($b = -.102, t = -.31, p > .05$). A further inspection reveals that participant self-ratings were not related to feedback acceptance when affective reaction was included in the model ($b = .176, t = 1.00, p > .05$) suggesting an indirect effect for participant self-ratings on feedback acceptance through affective reaction. Thus, the participant’s self-ratings did not serve as a moderator as indicated in Hypothesis 2, but instead was positively related to feedback acceptance through the affective reaction to the feedback session.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that the relationship between assessor ratings and affective reaction would be moderated by the participant’s extraversion. Regression coefficients generated from Equations 1 and 2 with extraversion as the moderator are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Results indicate that although there was a significant relationship between extraversion and affective reaction ($b = .007, t = 3.33, p < .01$), there was no significant interaction between extraversion and assessor ratings on affective reaction ($b = -.002, t = -.51, p > .05$). A further inspection reveals that extraversion was not related to feedback acceptance when affective reaction was included in the model ($b = .002, t = -.61, p > .05$) suggesting an indirect effect of extraversion on feedback acceptance through affective reaction. Thus,
Table 3. Regression coefficients for Equation 2 listed by moderator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderator variable</th>
<th>$b_0$</th>
<th>Assessor ratings</th>
<th>Affective reaction</th>
<th>Moderator</th>
<th>Assessor ratings × Moderator</th>
<th>Affective reaction × Moderator</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant self-ratings</td>
<td>3.733** .062</td>
<td>.230* .110</td>
<td>.381** .109</td>
<td>.176 .176</td>
<td>-.102 .333</td>
<td>.211 .296</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>3.700** .062</td>
<td>.257* .102</td>
<td>.402** .106</td>
<td>.002 .003</td>
<td>.006 .005</td>
<td>.005 .005</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>3.734** .060</td>
<td>.233* .110</td>
<td>.381** .109</td>
<td>.001 .003</td>
<td>.002 .005</td>
<td>-.005 .005</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>3.703** .058</td>
<td>.237* .100</td>
<td>.409** .102</td>
<td>.002 .004</td>
<td>-.015* .007</td>
<td>.018* .008</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 130$ except for analyses with participant self-ratings where $N = 124$. The number in the parentheses is the standard error for the unstandardized regression coefficient. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported because they were used in the follow-up analyses. Numbers are rounded to three decimal places because of the size of the unstandardized personality variable coefficients.

*p < .05; **p < .01.
the participant’s extraversion did not serve as a moderator as indicated in Hypothesis 3, but was instead positively related to feedback acceptance through the affective reaction to the feedback session.

Hypothesis 4 suggested that the relationship between assessor ratings and affective reaction would be moderated by the participant’s emotional stability. Regressions coefficients generated from Equations 1 and 2 with emotional stability as the moderator are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Results indicate no significant interaction between emotional stability and assessor ratings on affective reaction \((b = .001, t = .21, p > .05)\). Thus, Hypothesis 4 received no support.

Hypothesis 5 suggested that the relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance would be moderated by the participant’s agreeableness. Regression coefficients generated from Equations 1 and 2 with agreeableness as the moderator are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Results suggest that the indirect path between affective reaction and feedback acceptance was moderated by the participant’s agreeableness \((b = .018, t = 2.34, p < .05)\). The direct path between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance was moderated by agreeableness \((b = -.015, t = -2.14, p < .05)\). Coefficients for the analysis with agreeableness as the moderator (presented in Tables 2 and 3) were used to calculate simple effects at one standard deviation (15.74) above and below the mean on agreeableness. Results for the simple effects, which are presented in Table 4, suggest that the relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance was moderated by agreeableness such that there was a strong positive relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance for those individuals high on agreeableness \((b = .69, p < .05)\), but no relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance for those low on agreeableness \((b = .13, p > .05)\). There was also a significant interaction between assessor ratings and agreeableness on feedback acceptance such that there was a strong positive relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance for low agreeableness individuals \((b = .47, p < .05)\), but no relationship for the direct effect between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance for highly agreeable individuals \((b = .00, p > .05)\). Thus, results supported Hypothesis 5 and additional effects were found for agreeableness as a moderator of the direct assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship.

Because there were several significant predictors, additional moderated mediation analyses were conducted to determine which variables uniquely contributed to the prediction of feedback acceptance. Assessor ratings, participant self-ratings, and extraversion were included as independent variables because of their significant relationships with affective reaction and feedback acceptance. Agreeableness was included as a moderator of the mediated relationship. A summary of the tested relationships are presented in Figure 3. Results are presented in Table 5. Participant self-ratings did not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderator variable</th>
<th>Indirect effects</th>
<th>Simple effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessor ratings to affective reaction</td>
<td>Affective reaction to acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High agreeableness</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.69*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low agreeableness</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.56*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Low and high agreeableness simple effects were calculated by using one standard deviation (15.74) above and below the mean on agreeableness. Differences were calculated by subtracting low agreeableness from high agreeableness. Test of differences of the indirect and total effect were based on bias-corrected confidence intervals derived from a bootstrap procedure. *p < .05.*
Figure 3. Supported model for the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance. Note: There was no significant relationship between participant self-ratings and affective reaction when extraversion and assessor ratings were also included in the analysis. Thus, although tested in the final model, participant self-ratings were not related to feedback acceptance, so the relationship is represented with a dashed line.

Table 5. Final model representing the relationship between feedback acceptance and assessor ratings, participant self-ratings, extraversion, agreeableness, and affective reaction to the feedback session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: Criterion: Affective reaction</th>
<th>Model 2: Criterion: Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>4.021**</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor ratings</td>
<td>0.279**</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant self-rating</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness $\times$ Assessor ratings</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective reaction</td>
<td>0.352**</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness $\times$ Affective reaction</td>
<td>0.019*</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R$</td>
<td>0.230**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.200**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>6.930**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>5,123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported because they were used in the follow-up analyses. Numbers are rounded to three decimal places because of the size of the unstandardized personality variable coefficients. $^*p < .05; ^**p < .01.$

explain any unique variance in predicting affective reaction \((sr = .072, t = .88, p > .05)\) or any unique variance in predicting feedback acceptance \((sr = .061, t = .76, p > .05)\) suggesting that any potential indirect or direct effect of participant self-rating on feedback acceptance could be explained by other variables. Extraversion was related to feedback acceptance indirectly through its relationship with affective reaction \((b = .006, t = 2.45, p < .05)\). Assessor ratings were related to feedback acceptance both directly \((b = .237, t = 2.18, p < .05)\) and also indirectly through affective reaction \((b = .279, t = 3.23, p < .01)\). Finally, agreeableness moderated the relationship between affective reaction and feedback acceptance \((b = .019, t = 2.42, p < .05)\) as well as the direct effect between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance \((b = -.014, t = -2.00, p < .05)\) as described previously. Figure 3 depicts the observed relationships between the studied variables and feedback acceptance.

**Discussion**

We sought to better understand feedback acceptance in developmental ACs by investigating the mediating role of the affective reaction to the feedback session in the relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance, and by examining participant variables (i.e., self-ratings of performance, extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness) hypothesized to moderate the mediated relationship. Consistent with our predictions which were based on self-enhancement theory and AIM, higher assessor ratings resulted in higher feedback acceptance, and this relationship was partially mediated by the positive affective reaction to the feedback session. Agreeableness moderated the mediated relationship such that there was a direct relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance for low agreeable participants, but an indirect relationship through the affective reaction to the feedback session for high agreeable participants. Although extraversion did not serve as a moderator of the mediated relationship as hypothesized, extraversion was related to feedback acceptance and this relationship was fully mediated by the affective reaction to the feedback session, further emphasizing the important role of the affective reaction to the feedback session in feedback acceptance in developmental ACs.

Results did not support our prediction based on self-verification theory that participant self-ratings would interact with assessor ratings to predict feedback acceptance. First, participants may have been less likely to self-verify because of the type of feedback they received. Assessors gave performance feedback based on behaviors exhibited in the AC. The majority of research has examined self-verification in interpersonal situations or with personality feedback (e.g., Katz & Beach, 2000; Swann & Pelham, 2002). Self-consistent feedback is perceived as more accurate for feedback on information that is central to an individual’s self-schema, but not for feedback where little self-knowledge exists (Stahlberg, Petersen, & Dauenheimer, 1999). AC participants may have been less invested in self-ratings of behavioral performance than they would be on self-views that are central to their identity such as personality feedback. Second, it could be that assessors were perceived as a high status feedback source which limited the extent to which participants are engaged in self-verification. In a direct test of status, Collins and Stukas (2006) found individuals were more likely to accept self-inconsistent personality feedback from a high status therapist compared to a low status therapist. Brett and Atwater (2001) found a significant interaction for self and other ratings in the prediction of the recipient’s perceived accuracy of feedback when the “other” was a direct report, but not when the “other” was a boss or peers. Taken together, these results may suggest that feedback recipients only compare feedback with their self-ratings when given feedback from lower status individuals (e.g., direct reports). Given the limited research examining self-verification theory in
work situations, future research could examine under which circumstances (e.g., characteristics of the relationship or source) individuals rely on their self-ratings of performance in interpreting feedback, and to what extent completing self-ratings helps with feedback acceptance in developmental situations.

We did not find support for emotional stability moderating the relationship between assessor ratings and the affective reaction to the feedback session. One explanation is that our measure captured positive affective reactions to the feedback session (e.g., the feedback session was warm, friendly) as compared to negative reactions. Atwater and Brett (2005) found that emotional stability added a small amount of variance in predicting negative emotions about 360-degree feedback (e.g., anger, frustration) and research has supported positive affect and negative affect as two distinct factors (Watson & Tellegen, 1985).

Before discussing the implications, there are some limitations with our study that should be noted. First, participants indicated their affective reaction to the feedback session and feedback acceptance on the same measure. Given this, there is no temporal evidence to support the casual sequence of the affective reaction and feedback acceptance relationship. Beyond the theoretical arguments, our study does not offer support for the notion that affective reaction to the feedback session causes feedback acceptance. A second limitation was that participant self-ratings of their AC performance only had one rating per AC dimension. Although each dimension was thoroughly defined, and the final participant self-rating measure used in the analyses was an average of all five dimensions, problems associated with the use of single item measures may still influence the results. Despite these limitations, we believe our study contributes to a better understanding of feedback acceptance in developmental ACs.

Implications and future research

Our results demonstrate the importance of the affective reaction to the feedback session in feedback acceptance. Because affect served as a mediator of the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship, strategies that generate a positive affective reaction to the feedback session (e.g., starting with some off-task communication) might help increase feedback acceptance. In addition, Forgas (1995) suggests that judgments about complex information will show greater mood effects without objective evidence. For low assessor ratings, presenting additional “objective” information during the feedback session (e.g., playing videos of the participant’s performance, presenting data such as peer ratings) may reduce the importance of the affective reaction to the feedback session in predicting feedback acceptance. Future AC research should examine whether modifications to the delivery of information as recommended above can influence the affective reaction to the feedback session and lead to increased feedback acceptance. Related to this, it is difficult to determine the extent to which affect would have a role in predicting feedback acceptance in contexts other than the feedback session of the developmental ACs. Future research should examine the extent to which the affective reaction to the feedback session influences the feedback message and acceptance relationship in other settings where feedback is received (e.g., performance appraisal).

Participants’ extraversion and agreeableness were also related to feedback acceptance, suggesting that assessors should consider tailoring the feedback session based on the participant’s personality in order to maximize feedback acceptance. The relationships were fairly complex demonstrating the importance of future research examining more precise mediated relationships and moderated mediation in the study of individual difference variables in reactions to feedback. Extraversion was related to feedback acceptance, but this relationship was fully mediated by affective reaction to the feedback session. It could be that extraverts are more participative in the feedback session and able to
generate more positive affective reactions to the feedback session. Research indicates that participation in feedback sessions is related to satisfaction and perceived accuracy (DeGregorio & Fisher, 1998). Assessors should emphasize that the feedback session is an interactive exchange and ask pointed questions that encourage participation (e.g., “Which of the ratings/strategies would you like additional clarification on?” instead of “Do you have any question about what I just said?”). In the present developmental AC, feedback sessions were face-to-face meetings between the assessor and participant. It could be that introverted participants would be more likely to generate positive affective reactions to the feedback session using alternative communication methods such as phone meetings, and ultimately increase feedback acceptance. Future research should investigate these and other potential means of generating positive affective reactions to the feedback session from introverted participants.

For highly agreeable participants, the assessor ratings and feedback acceptance relationship was indirect through the affective reaction to the feedback session. Assessors should ensure that they use as much detail and support for their ratings as possible, even if agreeable individuals seem to buy-in to the feedback message. It could be that highly agreeable individuals appear to accept the information when in fact they are merely managing their emotions in order to maintain a positive relationship with the assessor. Consequently, these highly agreeable individuals may be getting less information from the assessors that could actually help them buy-in to the feedback message. For low agreeableness individuals, there was a direct relationship between assessor ratings and feedback acceptance. Future research should investigate if alternative means of conveying feedback that deemphasize the assessor ratings can still effectively relay the developmental information and lead to behavior change (e.g., giving ratings relative to other dimensions or focusing exclusively on behaviors while withholding the specific dimension ratings). In summary, the primary objective of our research was to better understand feedback acceptance in developmental ACs. We hope both researchers and practitioners can benefit from our research indicating the role of the affective reaction to the feedback session, participant’s extraversion, and participant’s agreeableness in predicting feedback acceptance.

Author biographies

Suzanne T. Bell is an Assistant Professor of industrial and organizational psychology at DePaul University. She currently serves on the editorial board of Journal of Applied Psychology. She received her Ph.D. in industrial and organization psychology from Texas A&M University in 2004. Her current research interests include predictors of job performance; organizational training; team selection, training, and conflict; and cross-cultural issues.

Winfred Arthur Jr. is a Professor of psychology and management at Texas A&M University. He is a fellow of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the American Psychological Association, and the Association of Psychological Science. He has served as an Associate Editor for Journal of Applied Psychology and is currently a member of the editorial boards of Personnel Psychology, Journal of Applied Psychology, and Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice. He received his Ph.D. in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of Akron in 1988. His research interests are in human performance; training development, design, implementation, and evaluation; team selection and training; acquisition and retention of complex skills; testing, selection, and validation; models of job performance; personnel psychology; and meta-analysis.
References


