

***Reactions to “Dual-Purpose”  
Assessment Center Feedback:  
What Does it Take to Get  
Participants to Buy Into and  
Actually do Something with  
Their Feedback?***

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# “Setting the Stage”

- ❖ Increasing shift toward using dual-purpose assessment centers (DPACs) (*Kudisch, Avis, Fallon, Thibodeaux, Roberts, Rollier, & Rotolo, 1999*)
- ❖ Assumed that DPACs: (1) are good selection tool, (2) offer a good diagnosis of participants’ strengths & weaknesses, and (3) provide feedback that can be used to improve job performance
- ❖ Participants need to accept and act upon feedback for it to be useful
- ❖ Despite considerable theory/research in the Performance Appraisal (PA) domain that demonstrates the importance of feedback and feedback acceptance, little attention paid to this issue in the AC literature (*c.f., Kudisch & Ladd, 1997*)
- ❖ To better understand effectiveness of DPACs, need to examine those characteristics that make feedback more acceptable to participants and lead to development activity



# ***AC Literature: Current State of Affairs***

- ❖ **Several studies have examined participants' overall reactions to AC feedback** (*Dodd, 1977; Fleenor, 1988; Iles, Robertson, & Rout, 1989; Rotolo & Kudisch, 1996; Teel & DuBois, 1983*)
  
- ❖ **Few recent studies address factors related to DAC feedback acceptance/accuracy** (*Baisden & Roberson, 1993; Burd & Ryan, 1993; Fleenor, 1988; Goodge, 1995; Harris, Paese & Greising, 1999; Jones & Whitmore, 1995; Kudisch & Ladd; 1997*)
  
- ❖ **General findings:** More likely to accept DAC feedback when...
  - *feedback presented by a knowledgeable assessor*
  - *assessor appears interested in participant's development/personable (MIXED)*
  - *feedback is perceived as favorable*
  - *feedback is accompanied by supporting evidence/specific examples*
  - *exercises are perceived as job-related*
  - *the process and outcomes are perceived as fair*
  - *participants perform well in AC, show good judgment and critical thinking skills, are tolerant, flexible, etc. (MIXED)*
  - *participants like the AC*



# ***AC Literature: Current State of Affairs***

- ❖ **Even fewer studies have examined whether participants actually act upon developmental feedback and engage in subsequent development activities** (*Engelbrecht & Fischer, 1995; Jones & Whitmore, 1995; MacDonald, 1988; Mitchell & Maurer, 1998*)
  
- ❖ **Limited findings:** More likely to act on feedback when...
  - *recommendations are seen as logical/ accurate (MIXED)*
    - *No relationship between acceptance & developmental activity (Jones & Whitmore, 1995)*
  - *participants are younger*
  - *participants are more educated*
  - *participants have a greater desire to attend the AC*
  - *participants perceive social support from the org, supervisor, and family*
  - *participants have a greater desire for promotion*
  - *participants perceive that behavior change will lead to promotion*
  - *participants perform well in the AC*



# *Limitations of Past AC Research*

- ❖ **No attempt to examine DPAC settings**
  - Because the climate of a selection program is incompatible with that of a development program (Thornton, 1992), premature to generalize DAC findings to DPAC
- ❖ Few efforts to replicate previous findings
- ❖ Few have simultaneously examined all 3 key factors within the Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor (1979) framework (*Kudisch & Ladd, 1997*)
- ❖ Minimal focus on assessee personality characteristics
  - Aspects of motivation (e.g., MTL, instrumentality)
- ❖ Limited view of the context
  - Overall social support vs. facets
  - Promoted vs. not
- ❖ *Other: Range restriction among predictors; method variance; inconsistent/loosely defined measures of feedback acceptance; retrospective nature of a key study*
- ❖ No longitudinal research

# Study 1

Government Utility  
Organization

# Research Hypotheses

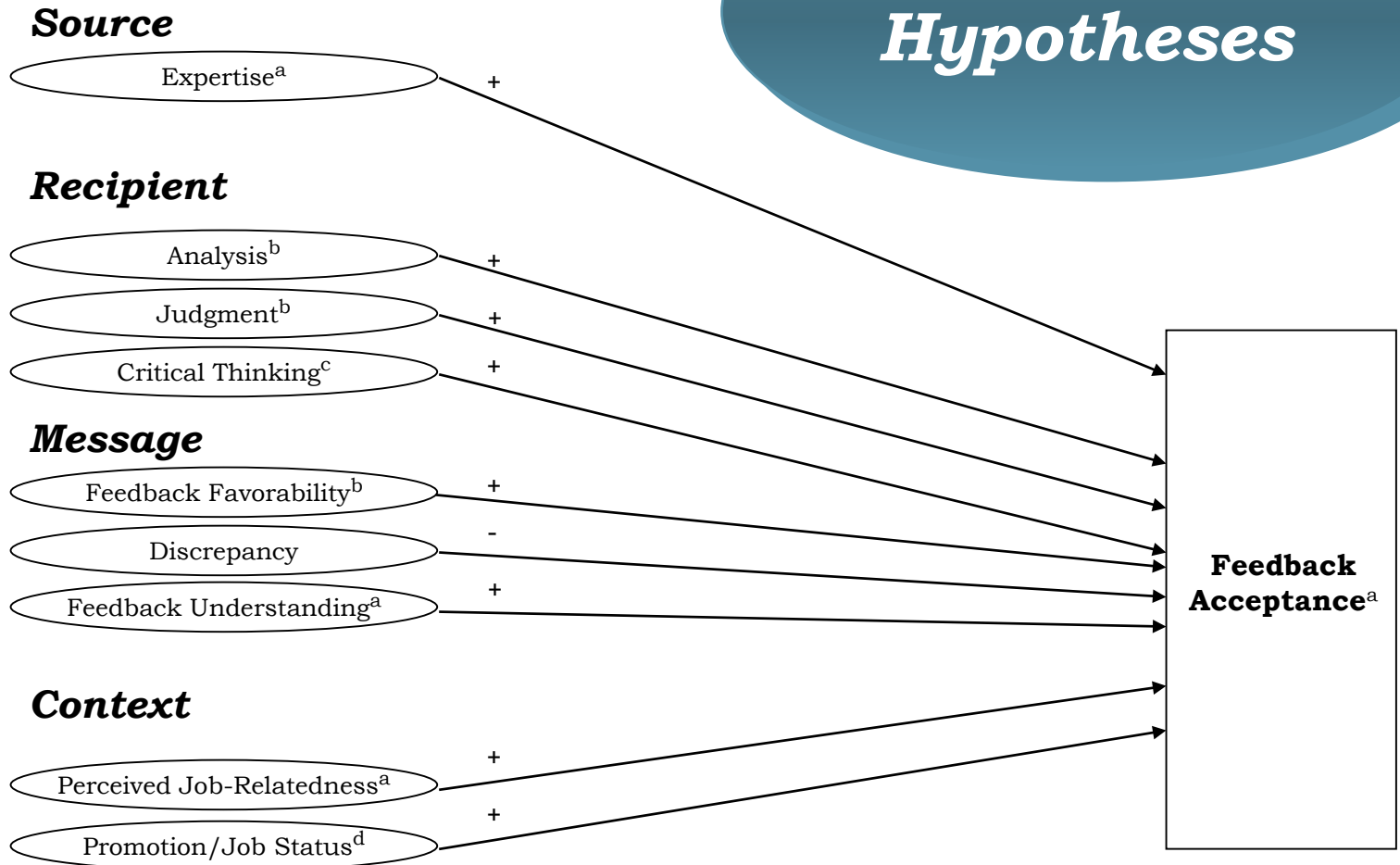


Figure 1. Conceptual framework summarizing study hypotheses. The “+” and “-” signs in parentheses indicate the direction of the proposed hypotheses. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by AC exercises; <sup>c</sup> denotes WG; <sup>d</sup> denotes personnel records.



# ***Methodology***

## ⌘ ARCHIVAL DATA

- ❖ Assesseees = 50 government employees
- ❖ Completed a DPAC used for personnel management and development
- ❖ Demographics:
  - 86% white, 14% black
  - 76% male
  - M age = 42.62 years (SD = 6.79)



# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Survey Measures**

*(Unless noted, all rated using 5-pt Likert-type scales: 1=SD to 5=SA)*

- ❖ ***Perceived Job Relatedness*** (6 items,  $\alpha = .94$ )
- ❖ ***Feedback Understanding*** (2 items,  $r = .69$ )
- ❖ ***Source Credibility/Expertise*** (1 item)

## **Other Predictor Measures**

- ❖ AC ratings (*5-pt Likert-type scales*)
  - ***Judgment***
  - ***Analysis***
  - ***Overall AC Rating (i.e., Feedback Favorability)***



# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Predictor Measures (cont.)**

- ❖ Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal
  - ***Critical Thinking***
  
- ❖ Personnel Records
  - ***Promoted or Not Promoted***
  
- ❖ Discrepancy Data
  - ***Absolute Discrepancy = the absolute value of (perceived performance minus overall AC rating)***
    - Where perceived performance = 1 item: *“Overall, I feel I performed well in the managerial assessment process”*



# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Criterion**

- ❖ Survey Measure (*5-pt Likert-type scales*)
  - ***Feedback Acceptance*** (*2 items,  $r = .87$* )
    - ***“The observations of my performance in the assessment exercises were accurate.”***

## **Statistical Analyses**

- ❖ Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations



***Results:***

***Descriptives & Zero-Order Correlations***

# Summary of Correlational Results

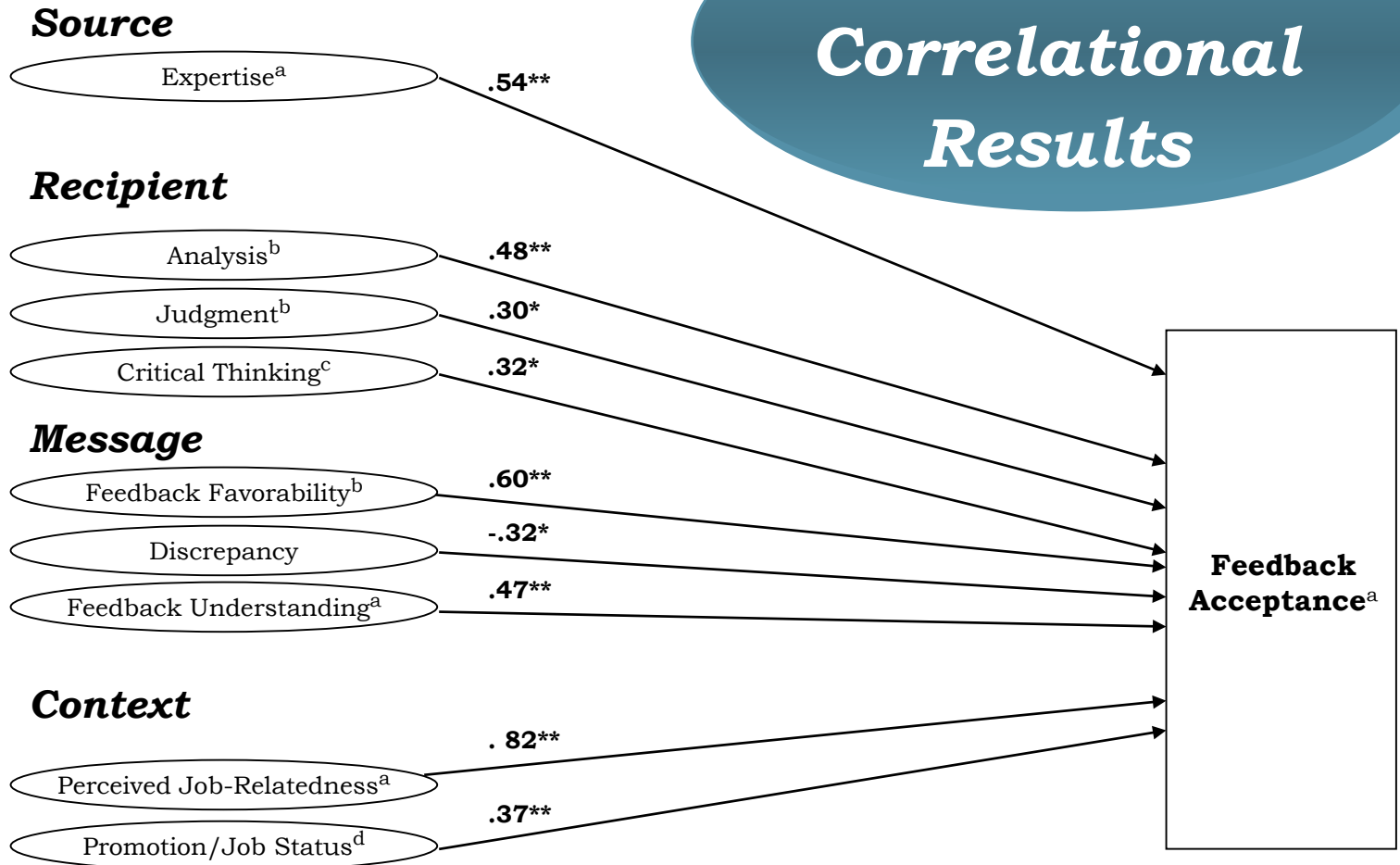


Figure 2.  $N = 48-50$ . Conceptual framework summarizing study findings. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by AC exercises; <sup>c</sup> denotes WG; <sup>d</sup> denotes personnel records; \* $p < .05$ , one-tailed; \*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

# Study 2



National Home Improvement  
Retail Organization

# Research Hypotheses

## Source

Expertise<sup>a</sup>

Assessor Concern/Interest<sup>b</sup>

## Recipient

Analysis<sup>c</sup>

Judgment<sup>c</sup>

Critical Thinking<sup>d</sup>

Tolerance<sup>e</sup>

Flexibility<sup>e</sup>

Age

Motivation to Learn<sup>a</sup>

Perceived Intrinsic Benefits<sup>a</sup>

+

+

+

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-

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+

+

+

+

**Feedback Acceptance<sup>b</sup>**

+

**Motivation to Engage in Follow-up Activities<sup>b</sup>**

Figure 3. Conceptual framework summarizing study hypotheses. The “+” and “-” signs in parentheses indicate the direction of the proposed hypotheses. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey 1; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by survey 2; <sup>c</sup> denotes AC exercises; <sup>d</sup> denotes WG; <sup>e</sup> denotes CPI.

## Message

FB Understanding<sup>b</sup>

FB Favorability (Sign)<sup>b</sup>

FB Specificity<sup>b</sup>

Value of Info for Career Plan<sup>a</sup>

Usefulness/Benefit of FB<sup>b</sup>

## Context

Face Validity<sup>a</sup>

Perceived Predictive Validity<sup>a</sup>

Value of FB Session<sup>b</sup>

Liking/Affect<sup>a</sup>

Supervisory Support<sup>a</sup>

Top Mgmt. Support<sup>a</sup>

Perceived Extrinsic Benefits<sup>a</sup>

Promotional Opportunities<sup>a</sup>

Willingness to Endorse<sup>b</sup>

# Research Hypotheses

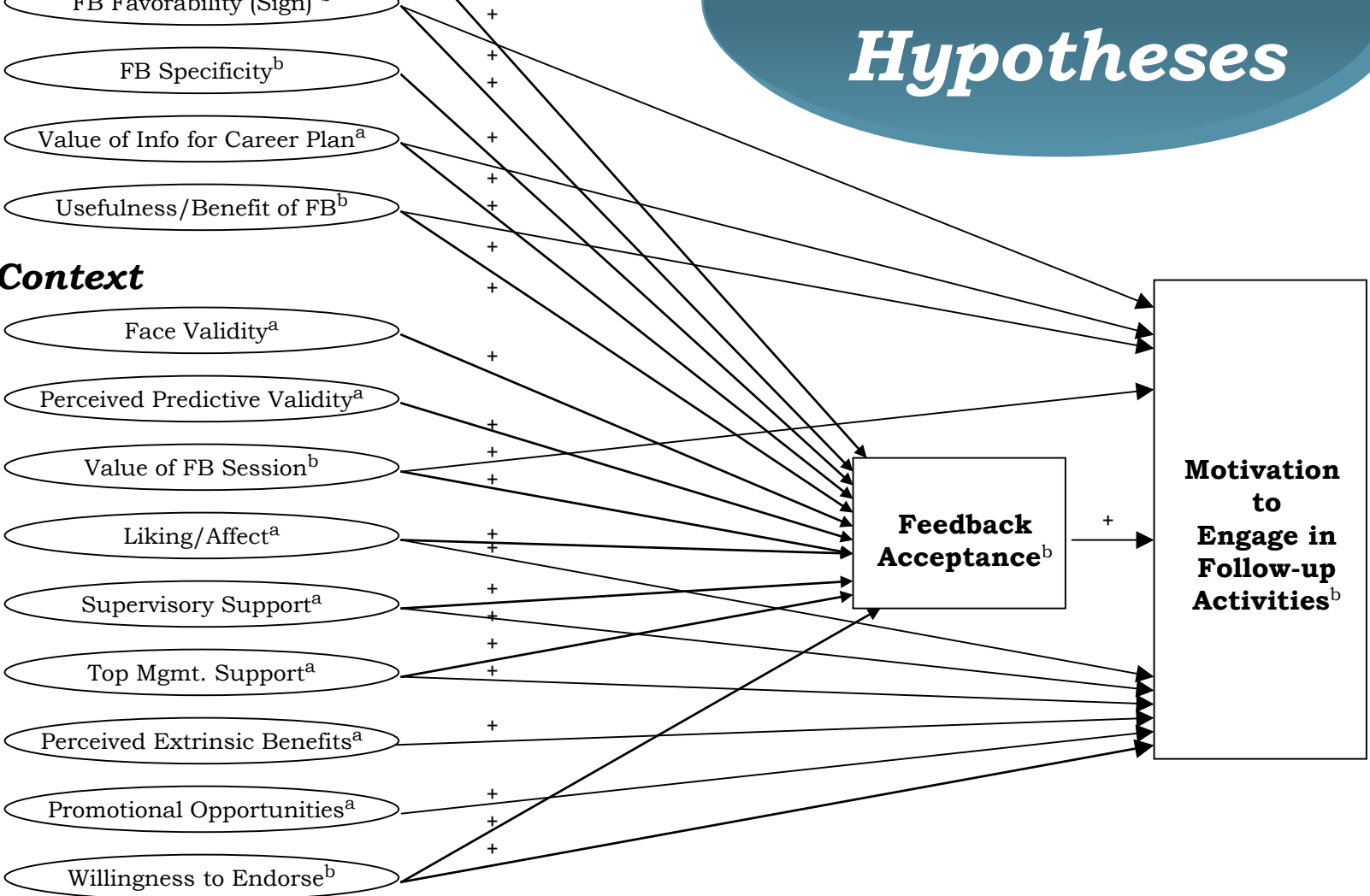


Figure 4. Conceptual framework summarizing study hypotheses. The “+” and “-” signs in parentheses indicate the direction of the proposed hypotheses. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey 1; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by survey 2; <sup>c</sup> denotes AC exercises; <sup>d</sup> denotes WG; <sup>e</sup> denotes CPI.

# Methodology

⌘ Assesseees = 58 employees

- ❖ Two Waves of Surveys: (6 months apart)
  - 47 completed survey 1 (81% response rate)
  - 38 completed survey 2 (66% response rate)
  - **36 completed both surveys\***
- ❖ 14 completed a supervisory-level DPAC used for promotion and development; 22 completed a management/executive-level DPAC used for succession planning and development
  - Groups were compared on all variables of interest
  - Significant differences only detected on the tolerance measure; thus groups were combined for all analyses, except tolerance, in which separate analyses were run
- ❖ Demographics\*:
  - 91.7% white, 5.6% black, 2.8% unknown
  - 55.6% male
  - 47.2% Bachelors, 22.2% HS, 11.1% Masters
  - M age = 37.70 years (SD = 7.01)
  - M yrs supervisory exp. = 7.40 (SD = 7.44)

\*Note: Demographics based on the 36 participants that completed both surveys

# Methodology (cont.)

## Predictor Measures – Survey 1

*(Unless noted, all rated using 5-pt Likert-type scales: 1=SD to 5=SA)*

- ❖ **Source Credibility/Expertise** (4 items,  $\alpha = .90$ )
- ❖ **Motivation to Learn** (5 items,  $\alpha = .74$ )
- ❖ **Perceived Intrinsic Benefits** (3 items,  $\alpha = .90$ )
- ❖ **Face Validity** (4 items,  $\alpha = .75$ )
- ❖ **Perceived Predictive Validity** (3 items,  $\alpha = .72$ )
- ❖ **Perceived Supervisory Support** (5 items,  $\alpha = .91$ )
- ❖ **Perceived Top Management Support** (2 items,  $r = .84$ )
- ❖ **Perceived Extrinsic Benefits from Top Mgmt.** (1 item)
- ❖ **Perceived Promotional Opportunities** (3 items,  $\alpha = .81$ )
- ❖ **Liking/Affect** (4 items,  $\alpha = .90$ )
- ❖ **Value of Info. for Facilitating Career Development**  
(4 items,  $\alpha = .71$ )

# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Predictor Measures – Survey 2**

- ❖ ***Perceived Assessor Concern/Interest*** (3 items,  $\alpha = .93$ )
- ❖ ***Feedback Understanding*** (3 items,  $\alpha = .88$ )
- ❖ ***Perceived Feedback Specificity*** (3 items,  $\alpha = .79$ )
- ❖ ***Perceived Usefulness of Feedback*** (5 items,  $\alpha = .90$ )
- ❖ ***Value of Feedback Interview*** (2 items,  $r = .80$ )
- ❖ ***Willingness to Endorse AC Process*** (3 items,  $\alpha = .89$ )
  
- ❖ ***Perceived Feedback Favorability*** (6 items,  $\alpha = .93$ )
  - measured using a semantic differential scale  
(c.f., Burd & Ryan, 1993)



# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Predictor Measures (cont.)**

- ❖ AC ratings (*5-pt Likert-type scales*)
  - ***Analysis***
  - ***Judgment***
  
- ❖ Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal
  - ***Critical Thinking***
  
- ❖ California Psychological Inventory
  - ***Tolerance***
  - ***Flexibility***
  
- ❖ Age



# ***Methodology (cont.)***

## **Criteria – Survey 2**

*(Both rated using 5-pt Likert-type scales: 1=SD to 5=SA)*

❖ ***Feedback Acceptance*** (5 items,  $\alpha = .92$ )

- ***“The observations of my performance in the AC were accurate.”***

❖ ***Motivation to Attend Training*** (4 items,  $\alpha = .94$ )

- ***“I plan to take training in order to improve any skill deficiencies noted in my feedback report.”***

## **Statistical Analyses**

- ❖ Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations



***Results:***

***Descriptives & Zero-Order  
Correlations***

# Summary of Correlational Results

## Source

Expertise<sup>a</sup>

Assessor Concern/Interest<sup>b</sup>

## Recipient

Analysis<sup>c</sup>

Judgment<sup>c</sup>

Critical Thinking<sup>d</sup>

Flexibility<sup>e</sup>

Age

Motivation to Learn<sup>a</sup>

Perceived Intrinsic Benefits<sup>a</sup>

**Feedback Acceptance<sup>b</sup>**

**Motivation to Engage in Follow-up Activities<sup>b</sup>**

.61\*\*

.62\*\*

.63\*\*

.33\*

.43\*

.39\*

.44\*

.69\*\*

Figure 5. Conceptual framework summarizing study results. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey 1; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by survey 2; <sup>c</sup> denotes AC exercises; <sup>d</sup> denotes WG; <sup>e</sup> denotes CPI; \* $p < .05$ , one-tailed; \*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

# Summary of Correlational Results

## Message

FB Understanding<sup>b</sup>

.58\*\*

FB Favorability (Sign)<sup>b</sup>

.73\*\*

FB Specificity<sup>b</sup>

.75\*\*

.47\*\*

Value of Info for Career Plan<sup>a</sup>

.61\*\*

.58\*\*

## Context

Usefulness/Benefit of FB<sup>b\*</sup>

.84\*\*

Face Validity<sup>a</sup>

.83\*\*

Perceived Predictive Validity<sup>a</sup>

.36\*

Liking/Affect<sup>a</sup>

.47\*

Supervisory Support<sup>a</sup>

.60\*\*

Top Mgmt. Support<sup>a</sup>

Perceived Extrinsic Benefits<sup>a</sup>

.36\*

Promotional Opportunities<sup>a</sup>

Feedback Acceptance<sup>b</sup>

.63\*\*

Motivation to Engage in Follow-up Activities<sup>b</sup>

Figure 6. Conceptual framework summarizing study results. <sup>a</sup> denotes measured by survey 1; <sup>b</sup> denotes measured by survey 2; <sup>c</sup> denotes AC exercises; <sup>d</sup> denotes WG; <sup>e</sup> denotes CPI; \**p*<.05, one-tailed; \*\**p*<.01, one-tailed. *Note.* Willingness to Endorse, Value of Feedback Session, and Usefulness/Benefit of Feedback were highly correlated. Therefore, the scales were collapsed to represent Perceived Usefulness/Benefit of Feedback.



# Discussion

## Correlates of Feedback Acceptance

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- ❖ 1st attempts to *simultaneously* examine influence of feedback source, message, recipient, and context characteristics in a DPAC setting
- ❖ **Feedback Source (Assessor)**
  - ◆ Importance of assessors being seen as experts who are concerned about participants' growth/development
    - *Study 1 vs. 2 discrepancies; relationship to past research*
- ❖ **Recipient Characteristics**
  - ◆ Skills & Abilities (Judgment, Analysis, Critical Thinking)
    - "Rich get richer"
    - *Consistent with Kudisch & Ladd, 1997; Jones & Whitmore, 1995*

# Discussion

## Correlates of Feedback Acceptance (cont.)

### ❖ Recipient Characteristics (cont.)



- ◆ What's in it for Me? The Role of Motivation
  - **MTL** consistent w/ T&D literature (Colquitt, LePine & Noe, 2000) & McDonald's (1988) findings: desire to attend AC & acting on feedback
  - **Perceived Benefits** consistent w/ Jones & Whitmore's (1995) findings re: career motivation; also consistent w/ Expectancy Theory
- ◆ Personality (Tolerance, Flexibility) & Age
  - Not related to acceptance; consistent w/ Kudisch & Ladd (1997)



# Discussion

## Correlates of Feedback Acceptance (cont.)

### ❖ Feedback Message Characteristics

- ◆ More likely to accept when feedback seen as favorable
  - *Though measured differently, evidence in Study 1 & 2; consistent with AC and much PA research*
- ◆ Importance of clear, understandable feedback
  - *Evidence in Study 1 & 2; consistent with Goodge (1995)*
- ◆ Importance of strong supporting evidence and examples
  - *Consistent with past research (Fleenor, 1988; Goodge, 1995; Harris et al., 1999)*
- ◆ Discrepancies: Size matters
  - *More likely to devalue feedback as it gets more discrepant*
  - *Consistent with Harris et al. (1999) and past PA research that has examined self vs. other ratings*



# Discussion

## Correlates of Feedback Acceptance (cont.)

### ❖ Feedback Message Characteristics (cont.)

- ◆ More likely to accept when assessees see the data gathered as valuable for facilitating their career development (*pre-FB*)

### ❖ Feedback Context

- ◆ Exercise realism matters
  - *Consistent w/ past AC research; Difference between Study 1 & 2 likely due to range restriction in latter*
- ◆ Those who react favorably to the AC more likely to accept
  - *Consistent with past research (Harris et al., 99; Kudisch & Ladd, 97)*
- ◆ Mixed findings regarding promotional opportunities
  - Study 1: **If I “win”, I’ll buy-in. If I “lose”, more likely to discount**
    - *Inconsistent w/ Jones & Whitmore (1995)*
  - Study 2: Lack of findings might be due to range restriction

# Discussion

## Correlates of Feedback Acceptance (cont.)

### ❖ Feedback Context (cont.)

- ◆ Is the AC process perceived as useful/beneficial? (*post FB*)
  - *Importance of assessees perceiving that feedback sessions help them (1) better understand feedback, and (2) gain additional insights regarding their performance*
  - *Importance of seeing the process as a helpful tool for diagnosing and identifying managerial strengths/weaknesses, and facilitating personal development*
- ◆ Doesn't social support matter?
  - No relationship with supervisor or top management support
    - ❖ *Range restriction with latter variable ( $\underline{M}=4.78$ ;  $\underline{SD}=.39$ )*
  - Side note: Consistent with T&D literature, MTL positively related to top management support



# Discussion

## Correlates of Development Activity Intentions

### ❖ **Those who accept the feedback as accurate are more likely to act on it**

- *Consistent with Goodge (1995), but inconsistent with Jones & Whitmore (1995)*
  - Caveat: **Examined intentions vs. actual behavior**

### ❖ **Feedback Source**

- ◆ Importance of Concerned, Caring Assessors
  - *Not hypothesized, but consistent with Goodge (1995) who found that greater care and concern by coaches had a positive impact on plans for self-managed learning*

# Discussion

## Correlates of Development Activity Intentions (cont.)

### ❖ Recipient Characteristics

◆ And the motivated shall prevail...



- *Positive relationship with MTL is consistent with MacDonald's (1988) finding that desire to attend the AC was related to acting on feedback*
- *Those that see the AC as a means for (1) improving their managerial/leadership skills and (2) advancing their careers are more likely to pursue development activities*
  - *Consistent with Jones & Whitmore's (1995) finding that assessor ratings of career motivation were positively related to developmental recommendations followed*



# Discussion

## Correlates of Development Activity Intentions (cont.)

### ❖ Recipient Characteristics (cont.)

- ◆ Flexible assessees more likely to pursue development

### ❖ Message Characteristics

- ◆ The more favorable the feedback, the more motivated to engage in training
  - *Inconsistent with Mitchell & Maurer (1998) who found that individuals with lower AC ratings engaged in more subsequent training*
- ◆ Those who valued feedback for facilitating career planning more likely to seek self-development
  - *Consistent with MacDonald's (1988) finding that the logic of recommendations was related to development activities*



# Discussion

## Correlates of Development Activity Intentions (cont.)

### ❖ **Message Characteristics (cont.)**

- ◆ Understandable, specific feedback (*Note: Neither hypothesized*)
  - *Consistent with goal-setting literature*

### ❖ **Contextual Factors**

- ◆ AC process being perceived as useful/beneficial
  - *Consistent with MacDonald's (1988) findings*
- ◆ Those who believed top management rewarded individuals for using skills taught in training expressed greater development intentions (*instrumentality*)
  - *Consistent with Birdi et al.'s (1997) finding that mgr. support positively related to career planning & development*
- ◆ AC process being perceived as enjoyable/worthwhile

# Discussion

## Correlates of Development Activity Intentions (cont.)

### ❖ Contextual Factors (cont.)

- ◆ Contrary to hypotheses, no relationship with age, social support, or perceived promotional opportunities
  - *Inconsistent with MacDonald's (1988) and Mitchell & Maurer's (1998) findings; also inconsistent with T&D literature (Birdi, Allan & Warr, 1997)*
  - *Latter two variables perhaps due to range restriction; lack of relationship w/ age possibly due to insufficient power*



# ***Pulling it all Together: From Theory to Practice***



## ❖ **Strategies for enhancing DPAC feedback acceptance**

- ◆ Use experts; importance of well-trained assessors (specificity of reports, coaching style during feedback sessions, etc.)\*
- ◆ Clearly communicate feedback\*
- ◆ Communicate the predictive validity of the system\*
- ◆ Use realistic exercises vs. canned
- ◆ At outset of process, have top managers emphasize the benefits of attending the AC (e.g., tool for enhancing leadership skills, chances of promotion, etc.)\*
- ◆ Solicit endorsements from good performers\*

**\*Indicates that these factors should also enhance MTL**

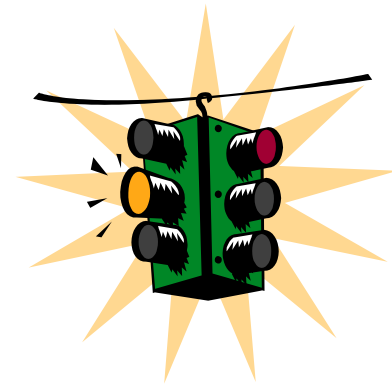
# ***Pulling it all Together: From Theory to Practice***

- ❖ **Strategies for enhancing DPAC feedback acceptance**

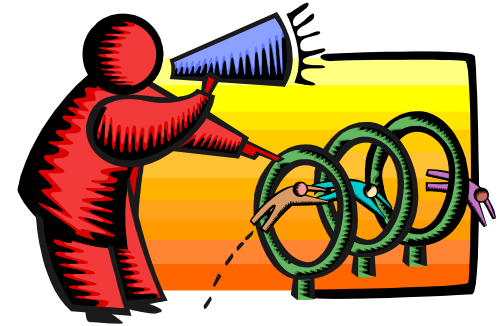
***But proceed with caution...***

such strategies may be insufficient given other factors that practitioners have no control over (e.g., assessee characteristics)

...may also be difficult if the assessee is not promoted or if the feedback is very discrepant from his/her expectations



# ***Pulling it all Together: From Theory to Practice***



## **❖ Strategies for motivating assesseees to act on feedback**

- ◆ Point out the value of information for career planning
- ◆ Highlight links between acting on feedback and attaining valued outcomes (better mgr, promotion, rewards)
- ◆ Importance of caring assessors/coaches
- ◆ Ensure feedback is clearly explained, contains examples

### ***However...***

may be more difficult when dealing with inflexible individuals or those who are less motivated to learn

# Study Limitations



- ❖ Small sample sizes (*power*)
- ❖ Archival data-related issues in Study 1:
  - ◆ Limited number of items to tap some measures (expertise, understanding, acceptance)
    - *Value of small scales (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997)*
  - ◆ Reactions collected after feedback had been received
- ❖ Methodological issues
  - *Method variance, range restriction*
- ❖ Measured behavioral “intentions” vs. actual behaviors
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Survey = 22% response rate
- ❖ Boundary conditions
  - ◆ Sample type, type of feedback



# ***Future Directions***

- ❖ Other potential determinants of feedback acceptance and behavior change
  - ◆ **Feedback Source** (*e.g., trustworthiness, power*)
  - ◆ **Feedback Message** (*e.g., format of AC feedback – Thornton et al., 1999*)
  - ◆ **Feedback Recipient** (*e.g., strategic planning skills, LOC*)
  - ◆ **Feedback Context** (*e.g., participation in feedback session, peer support for developmental activities, fairness issues, role of AC administrator*)
- ❖ Relative importance of predictors (*Kudisch & Ladd, 1997*)
- ❖ Stability of feedback acceptance
- ❖ Factors affecting various types of development activity (*c.f., Birdi et al., 1997*)

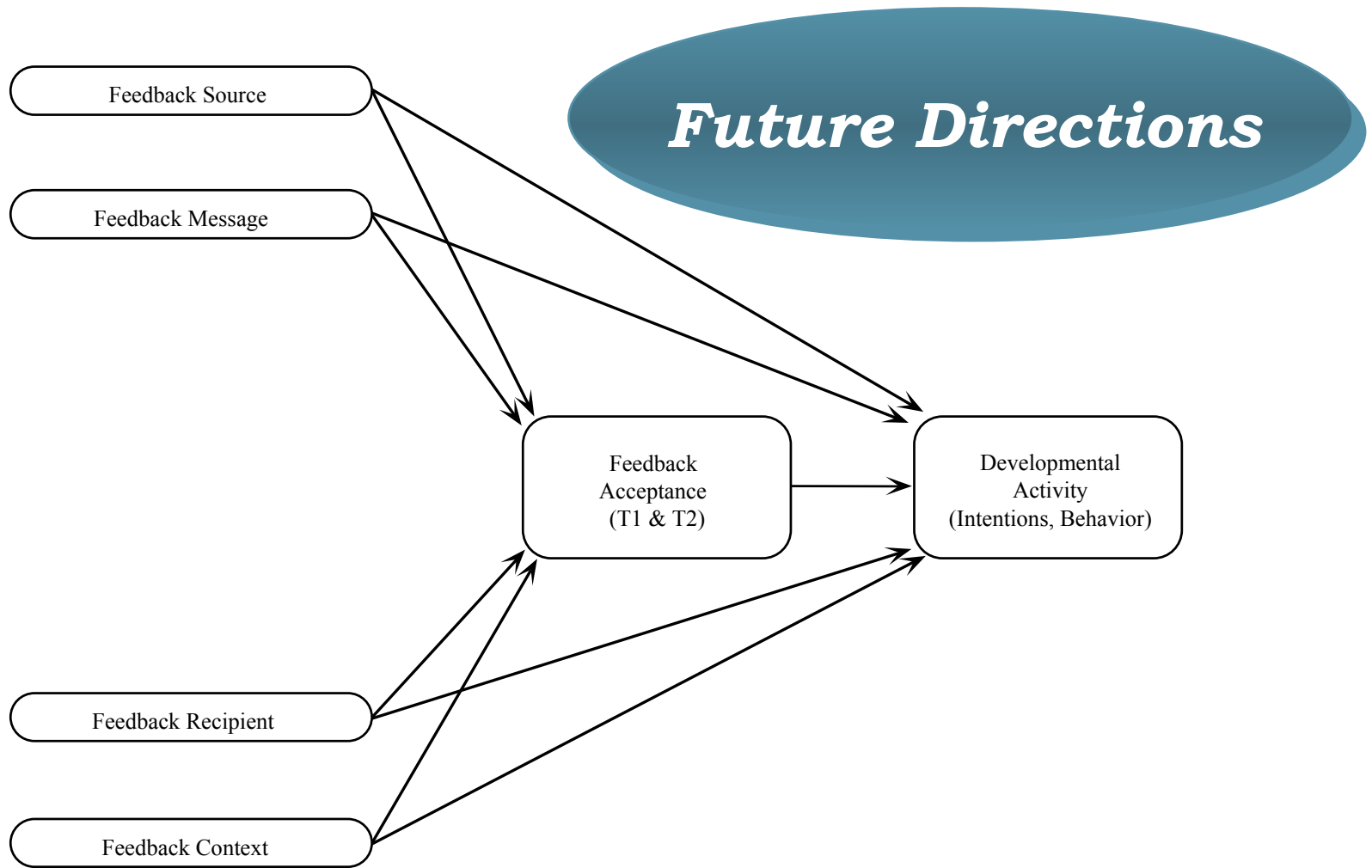


Figure 7. Conceptual Framework Summarizing the Relationship Between Feedback Attributes, Feedback Acceptance, and Developmental Activity.



*Questions & Comments*  
**Questions & Comments**



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