



Shopping for Confirmation

How Threatening Feedback Leads People to Reshape Their Social Networks

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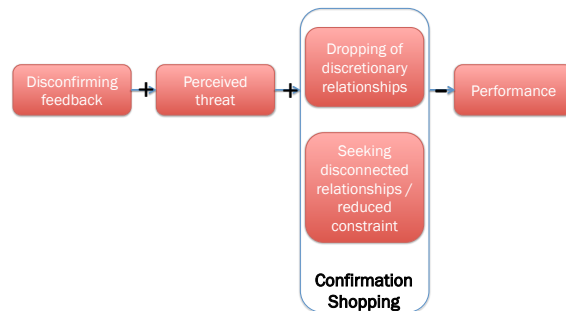


RESEARCH QUESTION

Peer feedback systems, though designed to provide developmental insight, are often not developmental at all. Developmental feedback requires illuminating deficiencies. But this developmental feedback is experienced as disconfirming to the recipient's self-concept, leading to self-protective efforts.

Do employees respond to disconfirming feedback by a self-protective re-forming of their social network? And if so, how does this influence performance?

MODEL



FIELD STUDY: DATA

- Panel data from a food processing company in the Western U.S.
- Self and peer-evaluations, collected from 2012, 2013 & 2014, from approximately 250 employees. Reviews completed in December of each year.
- Self-identified peer network for 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015. Network established in January of each year.

FIELD STUDY: RESULTS

- When employees received disconfirming feedback from a peer, they were **more likely to drop that relationship** in the next year.
- When the disconfirming feedback was from an obligatory relationship, **employees sought new relationships** with employees relatively unconnected to the employee's core group of relationships, **leading to reduced constraint**.
- Shopping for new relationships in response to disconfirming feedback led to **lower performance over the succeeding year**.

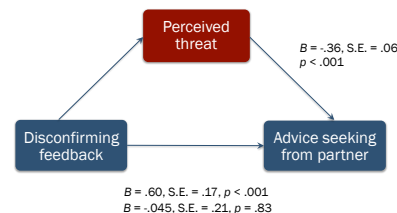
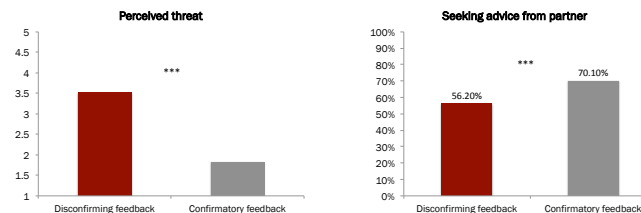


I THINK JIM IS A LITTLE SENSITIVE TO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK.

LAB STUDY

- 305 undergraduate and graduate students: confirming vs. disconfirming feedback.
- Students wrote a short-story, rated their story (1 – 10, not at all creative to very creative).
- A partner read and provided a review of the story—2 points higher than the self-rating (confirming) or 2 points lower (disconfirming).
- Participants responded to items indicating the degree to which they found the feedback threatening.
- DV: whether participants desired to collaborate with the feedback giver in a subsequent team-trivia task.

LAB STUDY RESULTS



ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

- In a second lab study, replicated results from Study 2, even when confirming feedback is equal to the self-evaluation score
- If feedback receivers have the opportunity to self-affirm before receiving disconfirming feedback, the feedback is not perceived as threatening and people retain the relationship.
- If subsequent task involves advice from feedback giver, then dropping the relationship results in poor performance because the recipient fails to receive helpful support

CONCLUSIONS

In a longitudinal field study, we found that employees who received disconfirming feedback from peers were more likely to drop relationships, or seek new, relatively disconnected relationships, in response to disconfirming feedback, and that the shopping for new relationship behavior led to reduced performance. In a conceptual replication in the lab, we found that this effect is mediated by perceived threat to the self.

- It might be naïve to imagine that developmental feedback is received as we imagine it's received.**
- We have a tendency to reshape our social environment in search of more flattering (less disconfirming) feedback**
- This, at least in part, has a negative effect on performance.**

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