UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE
FACULTAD DE ECONOMÍA Y NEGOCIOS
ESCUELA DE ECONOMÍA Y ADMINISTRACIÓN

Self-enhancement in Upward Advice Transmission: An Integrative Literature Review

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Alumno:
Santiago Ventura C.

Profesor Guía:
Edgar Kausel E.

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Introduction

The increased number and complexity of choices that take place in today's globalized world makes the need for "expert advice" more than ever in decision making (Humphrey, Hollenbeck, Meyer, & Ilgen, 2002). Few decisions in organizational contexts, however, are structured like juries. The need in organizational contexts for accountability and speed generally means that hierarchical authorities make decisions, typically after receiving input from a staff or subordinates or other informed parties (Humphrey, Hollenbeck, Meyer, & Ilgen, 2002).

Given this context, the aim of this work redeems to giving a broad set of concepts related to a particular case of advice taking, which is upward advice transmission in organizations, which affects in performance feedback through mechanisms of self-defense, like self-enhancement. To achieve this, an extensive literature review is done from general terms to more particular ones, defining processes as Decision Making, Advice Transmission, the particular case of Upward Advice Transmission (UAT) and some mechanisms that may make this phenomenon more difficult to happen, essentially, the one described as self-enhancement.

This work provides the theoretical bases for future research in a subject that has been undertaken and understudied, especially in a context where most organizations are interested in empowerment. By reading this work, the reader should be able to dimension the connections between the subjects mentioned above and have some insights on what future research should aim for.

Decision Making Process

Definition

Decision-making is the cognitive process resulting in the selection of a belief or a course of action among several alternative possibilities. Every decision-making process produces a final choice that may or may not prompt action. Decision-making is the process of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision-maker.

The process

In organizations, especially in those who focus on performance, decision makers are motivated to improve by digging out problems and searching for solutions (Simon, 1997/1947). To promote successful performance, the decision maker first decides on clear performance goals (e.g., sales goals) and sets moderately ambitious aspiration levels based on historical performance levels and the performance of comparable others (Cyert & March, 1963). After some interval of time has passed, the decision maker next observes performance outcomes, attending first to the goals he or she previously determined to be most important. The decision maker acknowledges a problem if performance is below the aspiration level. He or she then enacts a search "directed toward finding a solution to that problem" (Cyert & March, 1963), increases his or her propensity to implement changes to activities, and becomes more likely to choose from a pool of potential solutions those that entail greater risk (Greve H. R., 2003, págs. 53-59).

Decision maker's limitations

Decision makers' cognitive limitations are the chief subjective influence on performance assessment since, whenever they strive rationally to advance their own personal goals, this may not be wholly concordant with organizational goals (Simon, 1997/1947).

Decision makers in organizational performance

On any occasion when a decision maker feels responsible for organizational performance, performance assessment becomes an evaluation of the self as much as an evaluation of outcomes. People have various motives when evaluating themselves, including self-assessment (the desire to accurately assess the self; (Trope, 1986), self-improvement (the desire to improve oneself for the future; (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009), self-verification (the desire to confirm preexisting self-evaluations; (Swann, 1983), and self-enhancement (the desire to see oneself in a positive light; (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987), which will be reviewed in this work.

Advice Taking

Broadening the definition of advice

An extensive literature review provided by Bonaccio and Dalal gives a series of definitions of advice. Through this work, they use this term to refer to recommendations (provided by decision aids or advisors) that are prescriptive whereas information (used in forecasts) is descriptive or, at the very least, is seen by the decision-maker as being descriptive (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006).

Another definition of advice is provided by Sniezek and Buckley (1995). According to them, advisors "formulate judgments or recommend alternatives and communicate these to the person in the role of the judge" (p. 159).

Heath and Gonzalez (1995), on the other hand, define advice as an input from others that was sought because it could help decision-makers make better decisions and avoid mistakes, help them think about new information, help them organize their thoughts, and help them become more confident in their decisions. Furthermore, advice could include the provision of social support needed for the decision.

Cross, Borgatti, and Parker (2001) make a contribution to defining advice identifying five types of advice: solutions, meta- knowledge, problem reformulation, validation, and legitimization. These types of advice were ordered along a single dimension in the aforementioned order, and that an advisor who provided one type of advice was also likely to provide all the "lower" types of advice. Advisors might naturally provide solutions first, and then the other, less concrete, types of advice (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001).

The definition provided by Gibbons (2003) includes elements such as the provision of emotional support, the endorsement of the judge's initially chosen alternative, the provision of information or reasoning regarding the decision, the suggestion of a new alternative not initially considered by the judge, the provision of assistance for the judge to gain greater self-insight, and/or the provision of assistance toward the decision process. Others (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997); (Horowitz, y otros, 2001); (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001); (Whittemore, Rankin, Callahan, Leder, & Carroll, 2000) have also conceptualized the advisor's role as a provider of socio-emotional support in addition to task-related developmental recommendations, problem-solving assistance or recommendations of specific courses of action. In addition to these types of advice, behavior such as recommending against one or more alternatives could also be considered advice.

Pittinsky and Poon recommend a research definition for advice, specifying that a message is considered to be advice when it (1) communicates an opinion, not simply a piece of information or fact; (2) clearly addresses a problem or issue; and (3) presents a solution in an intentional, normative manner (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005). This definition may serve best through this work, especially when

reviewing the particular case of UAT, which will be explained later through this work.

In any case, broader definitions of advice will require researchers to formulate new measures of advice utilization/discounting and may even lead to new insights in terms of the central findings of the JAS literature, which Bonaccio and Dalal analyze deeply in their work (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). For instance, advice discounting could be less likely for emotional support, which Gibbons (2003) found to be one of the preferred forms of advice.

The definition of advice will continue to evolve, and it may best be conceptualized as a higher-order model, where the general "advice" factor subsumes a number of lower-order (i.e., narrower) advice facets. These lower-order facets could include, among others, the provision for a specific recommendation, the provision against a specific recommendation, and the provision of guidance on how to make a decision.

Why do advisors give advice?

Advisors give advice because their opinions and recommendations are considered to be worthy of consideration (Yaniv, Receiving other's people's advice: Influence and benefits, 2004b) or because they possess personal resources or characteristics that are helpful to the person in need of advice (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Reasons to study advice taking

One area that takes into account the fact that individuals do not make decisions in isolation is the "small groups" literature (Kerr & Tindale, 2004). However, this area typically assumes that group members' roles are "undifferentiated" (Sniezek & Buckley, 1995, pág. 159)— i.e., that all members have the same responsibilities vis-à-vis the decision task. Yet, leaders often emerge (and, in

general, status hierarchies materialize) from originally undifferentiated groups. However, in most real-world social organizations, role structures are formalized and contributions to decisions are commonly unequal (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Numerous important decisions therefore appear to take place within a structure that is not well captured either by an individual acting alone or by all group members acting equally (Brehmer & Hagafors, 1986); (Sniezek & Buckley, 1995). Specifically, decisions are often made by individuals after consulting with, and being influenced by, others. It is to model such decision-making structures that research began to be conducted on advice-giving and advice-taking during decisions.

In business, medical, political and military contexts, a great deal of decision making occurs in contexts where the decision maker is receiving advice from a number of different sources. The individual charged with the authority to make a decision does not have all the relevant knowledge for rendering the judgment, and the outcomes of the eventual decision will have far reaching implications beyond those for the decision maker. In these contexts, there is neither time nor a reasonable expectation that consensus will be developed (Humphrey, Hollenbeck, Meyer, & Ilgen, 2002).

Thus, the individual must take all the available advice and attempt to integrate it in order to arrive at a decision that utilizes the unique viewpoints offered by those whose opinions are solicited, or unsolicited (Humphrey, Hollenbeck, Meyer, & Ilgen, 2002).

Benefits of Advice Taking

Despite its omnipresence, people are often unwilling to use the advice they receive. After making an initial estimate and receiving advice, individuals tend to favor their own judgments (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Gino & Moore, 2007;

Harvey & Fischer, 1997; Yaniv, 2004). This is unfortunate, because using advice often leads to better judgment and choice (Larrick & Soll, 2006; Soll & Larrick, 2009). Taking other people's advice enhances one's understanding of a problem and may lead to positive outcomes (Yaniv, 2004b).

The tendency of judges to discount advice, and the benefits to judges' decision accuracy from combining multiple sources of advice— were anticipated by findings in the literatures on fore- casting and decision aids (see (Clemen R. T., 1989); (Collopy, Adya, & Armstrong, 2001); (Harvey, 2001); (Stewart, 2001).

Different individuals can provide unique insights, fostering innovation and improving accuracy (Ciampa, 2006; Mannes, 2009). Decision makers who take into account others' opinions or judgments—even if they use simple strategies to aggregate this information—can improve their judgment or choice (Clemen R. , 1989) and reduce error (Larrick & Soll, 2006). Indeed, the use of advice is related not only to individual performance, but also to firm performance (McDonald & Westphal, 2003), with research demonstrating that firms whose CEOs tended to solicit advice from people who offered strategic perspectives different from their own were more likely to perform better than firms whose CEOs who did not (McDonald, Khanna, & Westphal, 2008).

Brehmer and Hagafors (1986) state that relying on (expert) advisors should increase accuracy perhaps simply because relying on advice decreases the complexity of the overall decision. This increase in accuracy should occur, according to these researchers, even if advice is slightly inaccurate. In fact, Yaniv (2004a) (2004b) argues that combining the opinions of multiple, preferably uncorrelated, advisors increases decision accuracy because it reduces random error tied to each individual recommendation see also (Stewart, 2001). That is, aggregating across forecasts ensures that the resulting forecast has

lower variability, lower random error, and converges towards the "true" forecast.

Even though, there are some particular cases in which advice is more likely to be used. For example, evidence has shown that decision makers tend to seek and use advice when it (a) comes from experienced people (Feng & MacGeorge, 2006), (b) comes from confident individuals (Swol & Sniezek, 2005), and (c) is expensive (Gino, 2008). In addition, some characteristics of decision makers, such as their task self-efficacy or their task experience (Harvey & Fischer, 1997; Poston, Akbulut, & Looney, 2009), affect their willingness to take advice.

Limited advice taking and ignoring advice

Even though the benefits of taking advice are commonly known and accepted, several authors have described possible causes for decision makers to ignore advice, even when it could lead to better outcomes or performance. First, in the tradition of the anchor and adjustment heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), judges' initial estimates may function as anchors, which are not sufficiently adjusted even after including new information (Lim & O'Connor, 1995). Second, judges have a better assessment of their own knowledge than that of other people, as well as more accessibility to their internal justifications for a particular decision than they do for those providing advice (Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000). Third, superiority biases suggest that people tend to believe they are more accurate and important than others (Hoorens, 1993; Krueger & Mueller, 2002), which would explain why they ignore others' advice (Harvey & Harries, 2004; Soll & Mannes, 2011).

This third account suggests that people with greater superiority bias should take limited advice, if any, when making decisions (Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter, & Jackson, 2015). Decision makers' personality traits, however,

have been largely ignored as a potential influence on advice taking (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006); (Dalal & Bonaccio, 2010).

Advice discounting

Krueger (2003) argues that discounting may occur because of an egocentric bias. That is, judges may prefer their own opinions because they believe them to be superior to those of others—including the advisor. Krueger notes that decision-makers display this egocentric bias even when they are making judgments about novel situations or when they receive advice prior to seeing the decision task. (Krueger J. L., 2003).

Advice discounting is less pronounced when judges, rather than advisors, have reward power (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001); but see (Van Swol & Sniezek, 2005) judges' trust in their advisors will be positively related to advice taking (Jungermann, 1999); (Jungermann & Fischer, 2005). Evidence shows that incentives, though, reduce advice discounting (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001); (Sniezek, Schrah, & Dalal, 2004); (Dalal, 2001).

Upward Advice Transmission: A particular case of advice taking

Pittinsky and Poon make a literature review and analyze the concepts relevant to Upward Advice Transmission (UAT), a phenomenon that has been overlooked in research, even when it provides an important new perspective on advice-taking, particularly for researchers and practitioners interested in empowerment in organizations (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). This is also very important for transformational leaders, who are characterized as offering subordinates support, encouragement, and advice, but also as treating subordinates as equals and engaging in reciprocal relationships with followers (Burns, 1978). They define Upward Advice Transmission as the advice that flows upwards from those with less formal authority to those with more

(Pittinsky & Poon, 2005). Empirical and theoretical literature is reviewed in the context of formal hierarchical relationships. Later, they describe the main variables that may have big importance when studying this subject and they divide them in five categories to enhance research and practical understanding of UAT in organizations.

Power and Leadership

In most studies about advice giving and advice taking, advice flows downwards from people with more power to people with less power given the formal hierarchy. This is an explicit power dynamic. According to Emerson (1962), Person A has power over person B to the extent that person B is dependent on person A (Emerson, 1962). In hierarchical relationships, the power dynamic exists prior to the advising relationship. The meanings and relationships among social relations have been understudied, both in general (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001) and in the particular case of UAT.

Glauser (1984) reviews upward information flow in organizations for the enhancement of organizational functioning, which might be seen as performance feedback in organizations. He highlights the importance of information from lower organizational levels for managerial purposes, such as decision making, relationships between superior and subordinate and for organizational performance. In this review, Glauser refers to three factors that should be emphasized when studying upward information systems: (a) the structural difficulty for information to go upwards, (b) superiors limited capacity to collect, retain and process information (c) superior's low interest in responding to information that flows up and, therefore, making them unequipped to do so.

Glauser (1984) reviews the existing literature on upward information flow through five lenses, which Pittinsky and Poon (2005) use as a framework to identify key variables to consider when studying UAT to leaders in organizations. They use the same lenses as Glauser, but they deepen in each of them to breakdown the relevant variables to examine.

Key Variables for the Study of Upward Advice Transmission to Leaders in Organizations

Pittinsky and Poon examine upward advice transmission through the lenses of (a) characteristics of the leader, (b) characteristics of the follower, (c) characteristics of the leader-follower relationship, (d) characteristics of the advice, and (e) structural characteristics of the relationship (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Leader (Advisee) Characteristics

Gender

A study of upward advice transmission in the family, Poon (2004) found that the gender of the individual receiving advice may affect the frequency with which advice is given. In the same study, however, the gender of the advisor did not affect the frequency with which the individual received advice.

Researchers may wish to see if these results replicate to work organizations.

Leadership Style

For the purposes of their research, and in line with their study involving hierarchical organizations, Pittinsky and Poon use the term "leader" to refer to an individual with "formal" or "official" authority within an organizational hierarchy or structure (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Eagly, Wood, and Diekman (2000), identified two types of attributes of leadership: agentic attributes include assertive, controlling, and confident

tendencies, while communal attributes are those which involve concern for the welfare of other people. Leaders who possess more agentic attributes may be less likely to seek or receive advice from followers because of their feelings of confidence and their desire to control (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000).

In contrast, leaders who tend to be assertive, and controlling may also be less likely to accept advice from others. On the other hand, leaders with communal tendencies, in their willingness to engage with others in a caring and sensitive manner (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), may be more open to receiving advice from their followers.

Authority and Power

Kanter (1976) suggests that there is a distinction in organizations between leaders who are only authority figures and leaders who have real power. She argues that those with legitimate authority but with no real power exercise close supervision, are rule-minded, and are overly concerned with their own territory. Leaders who have real power and who are secure and confident in it are less likely to be defensively protective of it; such leaders may be more willing to receive upward advice from followers than leaders who have legitimate authority but not real power, because they do not feel threatened by the follower's advice. The leader's perception of his own positional power and his perception of external influences on this authority—such as threat, as (Kanter, 1976) noted—may influence the extent to which he will receive upward advice.

Perceived Openness

A subordinate's willingness to communicate upwards is strongly dependent on his or her perceptions of the superior's openness, evidenced by willingness to listen and to ask questions, demonstrated trust in the subordinate, willingness to approach the subordinate, and warmth (Poole, 1995).

Empowering Behavior

Conger and Kanungo (1988) define the key concept of empowerment as the enhancement of feelings of self-efficacy among members through identifying and removing conditions that foster powerlessness. They characterized empowerment as a process that involves a leader sharing power with his or her followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). As previously discussed, the advising relationship possesses a power dynamic. Upward advice transmission naturally counters the existing leader-follower power dynamic by creating a power dynamic in which the follower temporarily has greater power (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Konczak, Stelly and Trusty (2000) identified five dimensions of leaders' empowering behavior towards followers: (a) delegation of authority, (b) accountability, (c) information sharing, (d) skill development, and (e) self-directed decision making (Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000). Advising can comfortably fall under the dimension of delegation of authority in which the leader grants power or delegates authority to the follower. As upward advice transmission reverses the normal direction of the leader-follower power dynamic, leaders who tend to empower their followers may be more likely to receive upward advice than those who do not (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Follower (Advisor) Characteristics

Gender

A number of studies on upward information flow have found effects of subordinate gender (Sussman, Pickett, Berzinski, & Pearce, 1980; Young, 1978). In these studies, women were found to send information upward more frequently than men. Whether and how the gender of the follower/advisor affects upward advice transmission in the particular context of leadership should be examined.

Followership

Densten and Gray (2001) conclude that followers should be understood as learners, their role as teachers should also be examined, particularly when followers could offer beneficial advice to leaders (Densten & Gray, 2001). Theories of followership should be examined more closely in relation to upward advice transmission.

Credibility

Advisors are asked for their advice because they are perceived to have experience, understanding, wisdom, or insight into a given situation (Yaniv, 2004). Credibility may be established over a prolonged period of time during which the follower demonstrates his or her commitment and contribution to the group's goals (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Security

The follower's sense of security may influence the extent to which he or she offers advice to his or her leader. Athanassiades (1973) has found, in a study of upward communication, that the subordinate's sense of security as measured by Maslow's security-insecurity index is negatively correlated to distortion of information (Athanassiades, 1973). The degree to which such advice is distorted to the benefit of the advisor may be affected by the advisor's security.

The Leader-Follower Relationship

Gender Composition of the Dyad

Sussman, Pickett, Berzinski and Pearce, (1980) suggest that, in the context of the organization, the gender composition of the subordinate-superior relationship affects upward information flow (Sussman, Pickett, Berzinski, & Pearce, 1980). Whether these pattern still hold for upward advice transmission to leaders in organizations warrants further study.

Age Composition of the Dyad

Age is perhaps one of the most obvious and concrete social hierarchies, reflected in the common saying: "Older and wiser." Both the age of the leader and the age of the follower may affect upward advice transmission. For example, a young follower may feel insecure about advising an older leader. A young leader may welcome the advice of older followers, or the inverse may hold. Further research is needed (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Power Asymmetry

Slobin, Miller, and Porter (1968) found in a previous study that reciprocity in self-disclosure does not occur in asymmetrical relationships (Slobin, Miller, & Porter, 1968), and Earle, Giuliano and Archer (1983) found that high-power individuals were less willing to initiate an intimate exchange than low-power individuals (Earle, Giuliano, & Archer, 1983). They also differentiated between role/positional and information power, pointing out the inherent weakness of information power compared to role power because the latter is bolstered by external social agents. Positional power and informational power mirror the dichotomy within upward advice transmission. A leader has legitimate positional power over a follower, but a follower giving advice may have information power over the leader. This may affect the extent to which the follower/advisor is willing to disclose that personal opinion. Thus, the mere existence and level of positional power should be examined in relation to upward advice transmission.

Trust

Trust in one's superior has been found to predict a larger amount of upward information flow (Gaines, 1980) than when there is no trust. It would be

interesting to know whether the extent to which the leader trusts his or her followers affects upward advice transmission (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Specific Forms of Leadership and Followership

Owen and Lambert (1998) evaluated and discussed the differences between leadership and management, suggesting that they may be overlapping but distinctive categories of roles (Owen & Lambert, 1998).

Madzar (2001) discussed differences between transformational and transactional leadership and found these leadership styles to have varying effects on subordinates' information inquiry (Madzar, 2001). The heavy involvement of followers in the success of charismatic leadership calls for a view of leader and follower interaction. Charismatic leadership points up the importance of the leader in providing meaning for followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). A follower who identifies with a charismatic leader may interpret the world and the future through the eyes of the leader (Conger J. A., 1989), yet still be able to identify problematic areas in which adjustments could be made. On the other hand, the follower may be so captured by the leader's vision that he or she is unable to see reality objectively and empathically at the same time. Such a follower, seeing nothing but what the leader would see, would have no advice to offer the leader.

It is clear that leader-follower communication (or vice versa) is affected by the different styles of leadership and modes of followership. The effects of leadership and followership style specifically on upward transmission of advice awaits further study (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Message Characteristics

Threats to Face

The framework of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) suggests that advice carries inherent threats to the positive and negative face of advice recipients (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). According to Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000), advice threatens the recipient's positive face by suggesting that he or she is unable to determine the appropriate course of action. It threatens the negative face by prescribing a recommended course of action. Politeness theory predicts that advice from a speaker lacking power or closeness is more threatening than advice from a speaker with high power and a close relationship (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000).

Hummert and Mazloff (2001) found that impolite advice from younger individuals to older individuals was only received when given in a context in which the power dynamic was in alignment with the advising relationship; that is, when younger individuals had greater power over older individuals (Hummert & Mazloff, 2001). Thus, whether the message is considered to be impolite is in part determined by the existing power dynamics in the social hierarchy. The extent to which the leader perceives the message as impolite may affect his or her likelihood of accepting the advice. Similarly, followers may be cognizant of the potential for the advice to be perceived as patronizing or impolite, and may choose to deliver the upward advice in a manner that would be different if they were to deliver it downward (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Domain

Individuals seek others' opinion when they perceive their own judgment to be insufficient in making the best decision. Thus, a leader may be more likely to solicit advice from a follower if the follower has greater experience or particular expertise or if the problem has greater complexity (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Structural Characteristics

Rigidity of Organizational Structure

Hierarchies differ in their rigidity. Some structures may be more welcoming of upward advice transmission than others (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005). Further research is needed.

Proximity

Information flow in organizations is closely related to proximity. Bacharach and Aiken (1972) have demonstrated that interaction at the superior/subordinate level is correlated to the physical or structural distance between the superior and subordinate (Bacharach & Aiken, 1972). In the same way, proximity may mediate the frequency of advice transmission from followers up to leaders (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Organizational Level of the Dyad

Some studies have found that subordinates at higher levels engage in more participative exchange with their superiors (Blankenship & Miles, 1968), while others have found that superior/subordinate contact is not affected by organizational level (Jablin, 1979). If upward advice transmission follows the pattern of general communication, it may be more frequent at higher levels of the organization (Pittinsky & Poon, 2005).

Further research

Pittinsky and Poon (2005) propose steps for future research: studying the context in which UAT occurs may enhance researchers to study the roles of various contextual influences on UAT. Additionally, the variables aforementioned should be identified so special attention to interaction effects can be done. In order to do this, researchers should identify the primary variables affecting UAT (i.e. the variables that are universal to upward advice) and the secondary ones (i.e. the variables pertaining to the individuals and/or

the context in which upward advice is transmitted). Then, the process of UAT should be also examined. If UAT is indeed a sequential occurrence, researchers can examine each part in isolation in greater detail.

Performance feedback

Benefits of performance feedback

Performance feedback helps the decision maker to identify important problems, and these problems spur a search for solutions, changes in activities, and greater risk tolerance.

Self-enhancement in performance feedback

Alicke and Sedikides (2009) define self-enhancement and self-protection as interests that individuals have in advancing one or more self-domains or defending against negative self-views (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009).

This motive is likely to distort the performance assessment process, unlike the self-assessment and self-improvement motives, which should instead motivate decision makers to assess performance as accurately as they can (congruent with the decision maker's desire to identify and solve problems), and the self-verification motive, which should distort performance assessment primarily when decision makers wish to verify an unrealistically positive self-image (i.e., its distorting influence is mediated by self-enhancement).

Psychologists have long regarded the motivation to see oneself positively as a fundamental drive that influences cognition on conscious and unconscious levels (Kruglanski, 1980); (Kunda, 1990). For example, people tend to process positive information about the self in a more fluently way than with negative information and to take credit for their successes while attributing their failures to outside influences (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). These processes distort people's self-perceptions in a positive direction, and the self-enhancement

motive can even lead people to retrospectively revise their understanding of prior actions to make it seem to themselves as though they acted more competently than might actually be the case (Greenwald, 1980); (Staw, 1980).

Although self-enhancement is viewed by some as a general tendency (Taylor & Brown, 1988), research suggests that this motive is accentuated by perceptions of threat to the self-image (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996); (Gramzow, 2011).

Problem solving vs self-enhancement

Decision makers in problem-solving mode define standards of performance evaluation prospectively and, later on, assess actual performance by comparing it to their predefined standards (Cyert & March, 1963); (Greve H. R., 2003). So if performance is below the aspiration level, decision makers in problem-solving mode conclude that a performance gap exists. In contrast, decision makers in a self-enhancing mode of performance assessment may set performance evaluation standards and later retrospectively revise them so that the gap between desired performance and actual performance is minimized, reducing or even eliminating the perception of performance problems and thereby bolstering the self-image (Staw, 1980). The contrast between these two mechanisms of attending to performance feedback can be seen in Table 1 (Annex, Table 1).

Self-enhancement and the role of accountability

Accountability, as defined by Lerner and Tetlock (1999), is the implicit or explicit expectation that an individual may be called on to justify his or her actions or outcomes to others (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999).

This term broadens when making associations with performance. On the one hand, we have outcome accountability, which has been defined as "a condition

in which evaluation is based on the quality of the outcome of the response" (Slaughter, Bagger, & Li, 2006). On the other hand, process accountability has been defined as "a condition in which evaluation is based on the quality of the decision making process used to produce the response" (Slaughter, Bagger, & Li, 2006). Research has found that, under process accountability, individuals tend to choose the most broadly defensible decision strategies possible (Patil, Vieider, & Tetlock, 2014). According to (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989), process accountability triggers a motive for social approval, which can be achieved by presenting oneself in a balanced, non-self-enhancing way (Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1995). This is because societal or organizational norms of social appropriateness often punish people for presenting themselves in excessively positive ways (Baumeister, 1982). Thus, process accountability works as a deterrent to self-enhancement (Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002) because, in order to avoid rejection, the perceived presence of others generally makes people behave in a more conforming, less self-serving way than they would do in private (Baumeister, 1982).

In summary, there are two reasons of why we expect that process accountability (i.e., the expectation to justify a decision in front of others) will not deter self-enhancement among narcissists, and may actually increase it: (a) narcissists' beliefs that they do not need to conform to others' expectations, which make their opinions resistant to persuasion and (b) the presence of others make narcissists act in a more dominant, individualistic, and unique way (Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter, & Jackson, 2015).

Self enhancement implications in organizations

The variations in how decision makers assess low performance have important implications for some of the key predictions made by performance feedback

theory. According to the theory, perceptions of low performance signal to decision makers the existence of a problem; the decision makers then seek to resolve the problem by initiating a search for solutions, making changes, and taking risky actions (Greve H. R., 2003). If decision maker don't take into account their feedback performance due to a self-enhancing motive, there is no possibility to improve, which may lead to organizational detrimental in the future.

How self-enhancement operates

Self-enhancing assessments of low performance may take familiar forms, such as attending selectively to positive indicators and ignoring negative indicators (Baumeister & Cairns, 1992); (Sweeney & Gruber, 1984), or taking credit for successes and finding external excuses for failures (Bettman & Weitz, 1983); (Bowman, 1976); (Staw, McKechnie, & Puffer, 1983).

Self-enhancement propositions

In the context of self-enhancement in performance feedback, there are three self-enhancing cognitive strategies of performance assessment that have received limited attention in the performance feedback literature but that Jordan H. J. and Pino G. A. (2012) review. These strategies explain how individuals retrospectively reconsider the standards of evaluation used to assess performance.

Revising the Priority of Performance Goals

The first strategy Jordan and Pino (2012) denote in their work is related to temporal inconsistency to the extent that a decision maker may revise the priority of performance goals according to observed performance—that is, giving greater importance to those goals for which performance is favorable. People sometimes show a tendency to regard those things they are good at as more important than those they are bad at (Campbell D. J., 1986); (Dunning,

Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989); (Greve & Wentura, 2003); (Lewicki, 1983); (Lewicki, 1984); (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983).

Proposition 1: Compared to decision makers whose performance is above the aspiration level, decision makers whose performance is below the aspiration level are more likely to revise the priority of performance goals by giving greater importance to those that show favorable performance, which, in turn, makes performance seem more favorable and consequently reduces the extent of search, change, and risk taking triggered by low performance.

Increasing the Level of Abstraction of Performance Goals

Every human action can be identified at numerous levels of abstraction (Trope & Liberman, 2003); (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Lower levels of abstraction involve a concrete description of the action on a physical level, whereas higher levels of abstraction involve a more general description of the action in terms of the actor's intentions.

Taking advantage of the fluid quality of action descriptions, self-enhancing decision makers may restate their performance goals at a different level of abstraction— especially when they are threatened by a conclusion of failure if they stick to their previous level of description.

Jordan and Pino (2012) propose that decision makers may be especially likely to retrospectively increase the level of abstraction of their goals, since the more abstract one's performance goals, the more flexibility one has in defining exactly how, at a lower level, goal fulfillment might be specifically and concretely instantiated (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). After redefining performance goals at a more abstract level, the self-enhancing decision maker may search for evidence that could be construed as positive under the new and

more flexible description of what constitutes success

Proposition 2: Compared to decision makers whose performance is above the aspiration level, decision makers whose performance is below the aspiration level are more likely to increase the level of abstraction at which their goals are described, which, in turn, makes performance seem more favorable and consequently reduces the extent of search, change, and risk taking triggered by low performance.

Invoking Counterfactual Outcomes as Comparison Standards

Decision makers may deviate from the comparison standards they previously set for themselves based on past performance or the performance of comparable others, especially when performance is poor in relation to those standards. By shifting to counterfactual thinking (Byrne, 2005); (Epstude & Roese, 2008); (Roese, 1997), decision makers can justify their performance by comparing it to what would have happened had they employed different strategies. That is, a questionable outcome in the real world can be made to seem less bad by comparing it to a catastrophic imagined outcome that would have occurred, according to the decision makers' speculation, under alternative decisions. These "downward" counterfactuals generally make people feel better about themselves (Roese, 1994); (Sanna, Chang, & Meier, 2001); (Sanna, Meier, & Turley-Ames, 1998); (Sanna, Meier, & Wegner, 2001); (White & Lehman, 2005) such that self-enhancing decision makers may be more likely to focus on how things could have been worse than on how they could have been better had they acted differently— even though the latter "upward" counterfactuals are more likely to lead to adaptive changes to behavior in the future (Epstude & Roese, 2008); (Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, & McMullen, 1993); (Morris & Moore, 2000); (Roese, 1994); (Roese, Hur, & Pennington, 1999).

Proposition 3: Compared to decision makers whose performance is above the aspiration level, decision makers whose performance is below the aspiration level are more likely to compare their own performance to downward counterfactual outcomes, which, in turn, makes performance seem more favorable and consequently reduces the extent of search, change, and risk taking triggered by low performance.

Conditions Increasing the Perceived Threat of Low Performance

High level of narcissism.

Narcissism involves a grandiose self-image (exaggerated perceptions of one's own abilities; (Farwell & Wohlend-Lloyd, 1998); (John & Robins, 1994) and a need to have inflated self-views constantly reconfirmed (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004); (Campbell & Foster, 2007); (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004).

Narcissists tend to experience a sense of self-admiration and superiority (Emmons, 1987). Perhaps for this reason, some practitioners have reported that narcissists are poor listeners and disregard others' judgments, especially if they are in conflict with narcissists' own judgments (Lubit, 2002; Maccoby, 2000). This means that narcissists fare poorly when in positions of authority. This is also in congruence with a recent meta-analysis showing that those individuals who are high on narcissism tend to have poorer leadership effectiveness than those at midrange levels of narcissism (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015). This can be explained by the fact that effective decision making is one of the most important managerial tasks (Drucker, 2003), and, as noted, using others' advice is an important strategy to making better decisions (Ciampa, 2006; Soll & Larrick, 2009).

Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter and Jackson (2015) in their experiments' on personality and advice taking results found that narcissistic managers may perform poorly, among other reasons, because they are particularly ineffective in taking into consideration advice from others when making decisions (Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter, & Jackson, 2015).

Decision makers in organizations can sometimes manifest high levels of narcissism (Kets de Vries, 1994); (Lubit, 2002), and highly narcissistic decision makers can be expected to experience greater threat in the face of performance problems.

Proposition 4: Greater narcissism increases the perceived threat of performance below the aspiration level, thereby increasing decision makers' propensity to assess low performance in a self-enhancing way.

Belief that ability is fixed

Decision makers' views on the malleability of their ability may also modulate the degree to which they assess low performance in a self-enhancing way (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

Some people believe ability is unchangeable, whereas others believe ability can be increased through sustained effort, and that these different beliefs can have wide-reaching effects on cognition and behavior (Dweck, 1999); (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and organizational performance (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Within organizations, decision makers vary in the extent to which they assume that talent is innate or a quantity that can be expanded, and human resource and corporate training practices, for example, may reflect these beliefs (Heslin, VandeWalle, & Latham, 2006).

Narcissism and beliefs about the modifiability of ability are conceptually

orthogonal: a decision maker with a low or high overall view of his or her ability may view that ability as fixed or as modifiable (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). Evidence suggests that people with a growth mindset learn more in response to their failures, and consequently perform better in the future on the same tasks, than do people with a fixed-ability mindset (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006).

Proposition 5: A greater belief that ability is permanently fixed increases the perceived threat of performance below the aspiration level, thereby increasing decision makers' propensity to assess low performance in a self-enhancing way.

Accountability to audiences who can influence one's future.

Tetlock (2002) defines accountability as having to explain, defend, or justify oneself to an audience. This represents an omnipresent component of everyday life that links individuals to institutions (Tetlock, 2002). Other researchers define accountability as "the implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called on to justify one's beliefs, feelings, and actions to others" (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Here the assumption is that decision makers who do not provide satisfactory justifications will suffer negative consequences, ranging from disdainful looks to the loss of valued outcomes.

The audience can be perceived as a threat to the extent to which it can influence the decision maker's future through its evaluations. Some audiences can inflict negative consequences on decision makers who fail to justify their actions by withholding rewards or administering punishments, and thus exercising what French and Raven (1960) called "reward power" and "coercive power".

Accountability to an audience whose evaluation will not affect a decision maker's future, however, may not increase self-threat and may even sometimes

encourage thoughtful reflection on one's potential performance weaknesses (Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002).

Proposition 6: Greater accountability to audiences who can influence decision makers' futures increases the perceived threat of performance below the aspiration level, thereby increasing decision makers' propensity to assess low performance in a self-enhancing way.

Accountability to audiences who are focused on outcomes or on process

When decision makers are held accountable for ultimate performance outcomes alone and must justify those outcomes retrospectively, they may feel an increased need to self-enhance and see performance outcomes in a positive light (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). Contrary, with process accountability, it is possible to see oneself as performing competently—that is, making good decisions, given the information available at the time of the decisions— even if ultimate performance outcomes are acknowledged as subpar (Salancik, 1977).

Proposition 7: Greater accountability to audiences who are focused on ultimate performance outcomes increases the perceived threat of performance below the aspiration level, thereby in- creasing decision makers' propensity

Conditions Increasing the Latitude to Portray Performance Positively

High task complexity

Decision makers' jobs vary tremendously in what has been called "task complexity" (Campbell D. J., 1988); (Wood, 1986). Today's tasks are far more complex than fifty years ago. This complexity in tasks involve a large number of subtasks or component acts composing the complete task, as well as a large number of information cues, sources, or dimensions that inform the completion of each subtask (Campbell D. J., 1988); (Wood, 1986). With low-complexity

tasks, on the one hand, performance is relatively straightforward to define. On the other hand, with greater task complexity comes greater flexibility in defining and redefining performance (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

When task performance itself is a "complex situation", decision makers' tendency to portray performance in a positive light is greater, and this is likely to impact their propensity to form self-enhancing assessments of low performance (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). While low performance motivates self-enhancement by threatening a decision maker's self-image, task complexity influences the extent to which decision makers can portray low performance in a positive light (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

Proposition 8: Greater task complexity increases the latitude to portray performance below the aspiration level in a positive light, thereby increasing decision makers' propensity to assess low performance in a self- enhancing way.

Possession of Informational Power

The level of informational power possessed by decision makers may affect the likelihood of self-enhancing assessments of low performance by altering their latitude to portray low performance positively (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). Decision makers who occupy more central positions are perceived as more influential in part because of their greater access to information (Brass, 1984); (Friedkin, 1993); (Krackhardt, 1990). Information that is in demand and not easily available confers to those who have access to it the ability to produce outcomes aligned with their perceived interests (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

Pfeffer (1981) (1997) makes a link between information and power to the extent

that decision makers with greater access to information can selectively report performance relevant information that is more favorable to them and more acceptable to interested audiences. Therefore, greater informational power increases decision makers' propensity to self-enhance in response to low performance. Decision makers with greater informational power are more likely to form self-enhancing assessments of performance because privileged access to information affords them greater latitude to portray performance positively (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

Proposition 9: Greater informational power increases the latitude to portray performance below the aspiration level in a positive light, thereby increasing decision makers' propensity to assess low performance in a self-enhancing way.

Proposition 10: The effect that conditions increasing the perceived threat of low performance have on the propensity to form self-enhancing assessments of low performance is greater when the latitude to portray performance positively is high rather than low. Likewise, the effect that conditions increasing the latitude to portray performance positively have on the propensity to form self-enhancing assessments of low performance is greater when the perceived threat of low performance is high rather than low.

A Two-Mode Model of Learning from Performance Feedback

In the conventional model of learning from performance feedback (Annex: Figure 1), the decision maker responds to performance below the aspiration level by increasing search, making changes, and taking risky actions. The two-mode model of learning from performance feedback (Annex: Figure 2), provided by Jordan H. J. and Pino G. A. (2012) suggests that the degree to which the decision maker responds to low performance by increasing search, making changes, and taking risky actions depends on whether he or she assesses low

performance adopting the self-enhancing mode or the problem-solving mode of performance assessment. The conditions specified in Propositions 4 through 10 combine to influence whether the decision maker will opt for the problem-solving mode or the self-enhancing mode. The self-enhancing mode involves retrospectively revising standards of evaluation, as specified in Propositions 1 through 3, so that low performance is perceived to be more favorable than it really is. Consequently, opting for the self-enhancement mode leads to lesser search, change, and risk taking than when low-performing decision makers opt for the problem-solving mode.

Reducing self-enhancement

Jordan H. J. and Pino G. A. (2012) target their interventions at the two key facilitators of self-enhancement reviewed in their article: (1) the decision maker's latitude to portray low performance in a positive light and (2) the threat to the decision maker's self-image.

Organizations can limit decision makers' latitude to portray low performance positively by implementing appropriate formal control systems—the rules, standard procedures, and incentive structures that help to shape organization members' behaviors (Langfield-Smith, 1997); (Walsh & Seward, 1990). Because powerful decision makers engaged in highly complex tasks often have significant latitude to retrospectively revise standards of evaluation to fit observed performance, it may be especially important to require top managers to prospectively commit to specific, well-defined standards of evaluation so that they cannot later use slippery performance-redefining strategies (Staw, 1980). Formal systems that incentivize the regular and prospective setting of tightly circumscribed standards of evaluation are thus one means by which organizations might rein in decision makers' self-enhancing tendencies (Jordan

H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012). Informal control systems (Chatman & Cha, 2003), on the other hand, can exert their effects on organization members continuously and can be tailored to reduce the self-threat that low performance poses for decision makers and, thus, can attenuate self-enhancement (Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A., 2012).

Discussion

Jordan and Pino refer to two limitations in the scope of their analysis that point to future directions for research. First, their scope was focused on the self-enhancement motive. This, by any means, does not mean to imply that it is the only self-evaluative motive worthy of additional attention. Complex behavior can never be reduced to a single explanation, and drawing on other established constructs in social psychology will yield similarly productive opportunities for theoretical development. This is what this work has been trying to do up to this point.

The unit of analysis in their work has been the individual decision maker, and the implications of the self-enhancement literature for organizational processes of learning from performance feedback are beyond the scope of their article. Although researchers interested in the study of performance feedback have often used individual-level theories to successfully explain organizational-level outcomes influenced by powerful actors, such as top executives of firms (Audia, Locke, & Smith, 2000); (Greve H. R., 1998), additional work is needed to fully integrate insights from the self-enhancement literature into the theory of performance feedback.

Conclusion

The aim of this work is to serve as a conceptual framework for future research in a subject that has been undertaken and understudied, and that deserves more

dedication given the actual context of globalization and change, where most organizations are, or at least should be, interested in empowerment. It does so by defining the concepts on the different subjects and providing certain guidelines for future researchers. The reader should be able to dimension the connections between Decision Making, Advice Taking, Upward Advice Transmission and Self-Enhancement, among others, and have some insights on what future research should aim for. It is my hope that this insights will have positive repercussions in organizational performance in the future.

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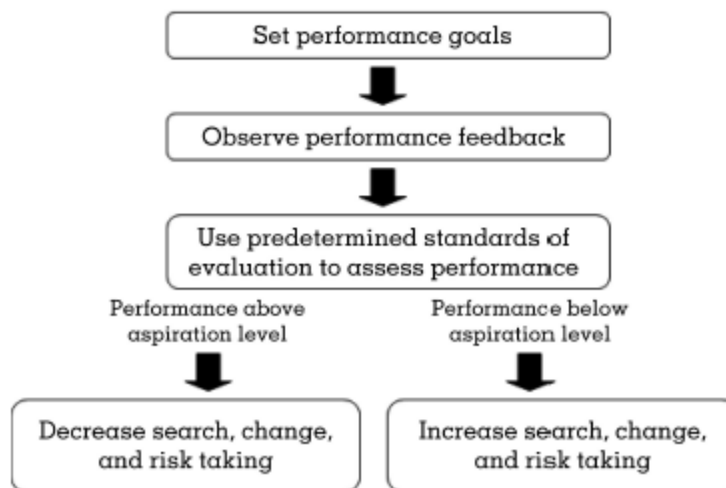
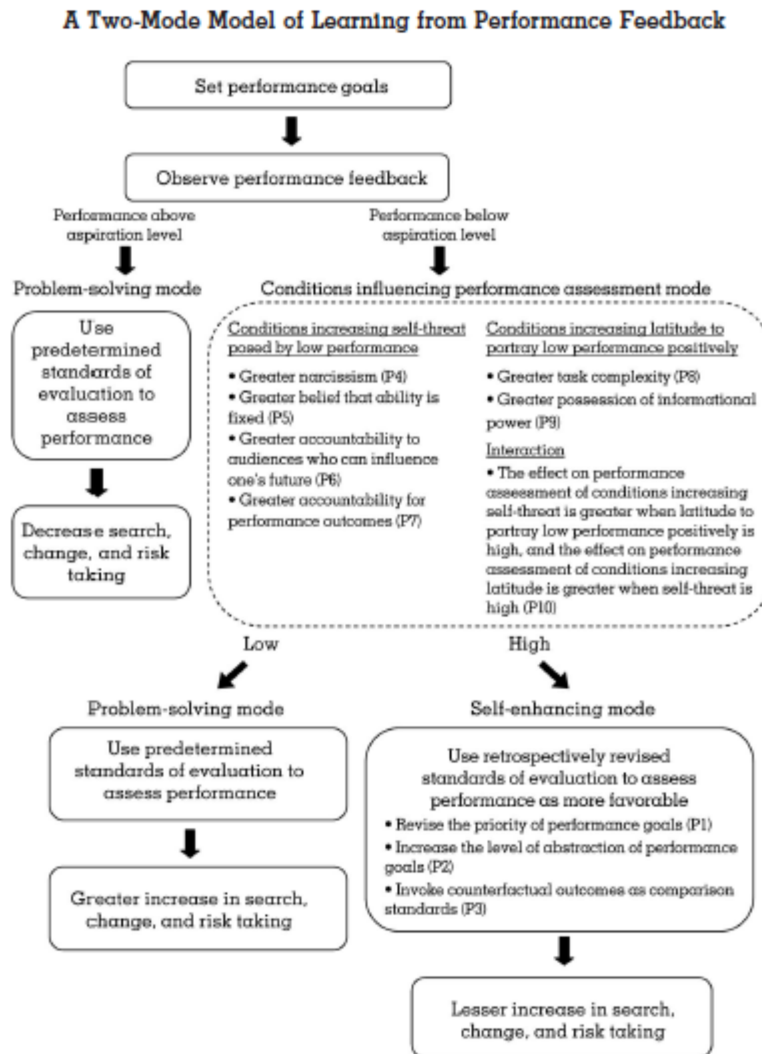
Annex

Figure 1



Extracted from Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A. (2012).

Figure 2



Extracted from Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A. (2012).

Table 1

Two Modes of Performance Assessment

Features of Performance Assessment	Problem-Solving Mode	Self-Enhancing Mode
Primary motivation	Fix problems; improve performance	See oneself in a positive light; assess performance as satisfactory
Standards of evaluation	Predetermined; temporally consistent	Fluid; temporally inconsistent
Priority of performance goals	Fixed	Shifting
Primary temporal orientation	Prospective; reasoning motivates conclusions	Retrospective; conclusions motivate reasoning

Extracted from Jordan H. J. & Pino G. A. (2012).