

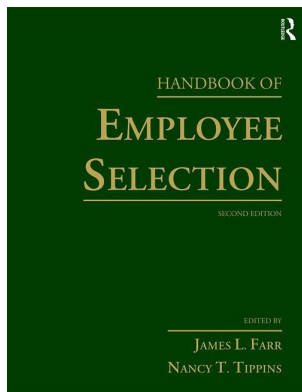
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ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK

MANUEL LONDON AND LYNN A. MCFARLAND

This chapter explores the role of feedback in the assessment process. The content of assessment feedback can range anywhere from a pass/fail statement to a detailed, competency-based report delivered in person and followed up with suggestions for development. Unlike feedback in other contexts, such as performance appraisal, selection feedback is not generally about how applicants can improve their performance in the future. Indeed, many tools are used in selection to measure areas where we do not believe people can easily improve, such as personality characteristics and general cognitive ability. Although the primary purpose of feedback may be to explain the selection decision, feedback may influence applicants' perceptions of fairness, their self-image, and their reactions to the organization. This, in turn, may affect applicants' behavior, such as whether or not to accept a job or recommend the organization to another prospective employee. Also, although not necessarily the intended purpose, selection feedback may be useful to guide applicants' development—whether to help them next time they apply for a position, repeat a similar test for the same job, accept a job offer, or need or want further training to enhance their job performance. Furthermore, organizations and human resource (HR) professionals who are responsible for selection may view giving feedback as a professional and ethical obligation, or it may be required by law in some cases. Assessment feedback also can affect the organization's reputation, for instance, as a respectful, development-oriented employer.

Here we consider the benefits and drawbacks of providing feedback from the standpoint of the organization and the candidate. We review the literature on test givers' obligations to provide feedback, candidates' reactions to feedback, and the potential costs and benefits of feedback to the recipients and the organization. Finally, we consider implications for practice and areas for research to better understand the role of feedback from individual and organizational perspectives.

SOME CASE EXAMPLES

Consider some examples of deciding whether or not to provide post-selection feedback to candidates. The first example involves an online assessment center (AC); the second, an objective preemployment test; and the third, an individual assessment for executive selection.

Assessment Center Feedback

A large, national management consulting firm is hiring 15 recent MBA graduates for entry-level support positions. The jobs require analytic skills, client relations, high work standards, ability to work well in teams, and motivation. Organizational psychologists on the HR staff develop a

selection method that includes a battery of psychological tests, a measure of cognitive ability, a biodata form, two business exercises to produce work samples (simulations that ask candidates to set priorities, write e-mails, and respond to phone calls), and a test that asks how the candidate would handle certain situations. The assessment is conducted online. Participants can log in from remote locations. The assessment process provides a wealth of information that helps the firm decide whom to hire and, for those hired, what development and job experiences they need to improve their chances for success. The information would also be valuable to candidates who are not selected to help them guide their own early career decisions.

The HR staff considered the following: the online assessment easily allowed giving feedback immediately after the completion of testing. This is in stark comparison to past situations where such an assessment would be conducted in person with small groups of participants making specific feedback more time-consuming and costly to deliver. Now the decision to not deliver feedback is not as justifiable on economic or practical grounds. So, the HR staff wondered, should they give all candidates feedback immediately after the assessment? Should they wait until a selection decision is made, inform the candidates, and then invite them to return for feedback? Does this risk divulging proprietary information about the testing process and its validity? Does this put the firm at risk if candidates question the selection process's fairness or accuracy? Should only those who are hired be offered feedback? Should the firm require that those who are hired receive feedback and use the information to establish a development plan? Should a report be prepared for each candidate and sent to a new hire's immediate supervisor to review with the candidate?

Test Feedback

A restaurant is hiring food service personnel. It uses a biodata form, an integrity test to assess self-reports of honesty, and an interview. Hundreds of people take the test each year, administered by the managers of the company's restaurants across the country. What type of feedback should the restaurant provide to applicants who are selected and those who are not, other than to inform them of the decision?

Individual Assessment for Executive Selection

A multinational consumer products company is hiring a marketing vice president. The company HR department works with the CEO to hire an executive search firm to help identify candidates. A personnel psychologist working for the search firm meets with the CEO and others in the organization to determine the job demands and expectations and formulate a set of desired characteristics for the successful candidate, including knowledge, experience, motivation, and interpersonal skills. Also, the psychologist develops a screening technique to identify candidates for further analysis and ultimately formulates an individual assessment consisting of a battery of personality tests along with background and situational interview questions for the top candidates. Three candidates make it to the final stage and agree to complete the selection tests. The psychologist writes a detailed report about each candidate for the hiring CEO to review before interviewing the candidates, talking to references who know the candidates well, and making a final decision. This process raises several questions about feedback: Should the reports be available to the candidates? Who should deliver the reports? Might the results be used to support the candidates' development? Should the organization simply hand the report to the candidates? Should the candidates not receive any feedback other than not being offered the job?

The questions about feedback in these examples deal with how feedback fits within the selection process. Should applicants be told more than whether or not they were selected? If they were not chosen, should they receive more specific information that might help them in the future? More generally, how does feedback fit within the assessment process? We can begin to answer these questions by turning to professional testing standards for guidance.

FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Although feedback is a neglected aspect of testing, professional standards for test development and administration provide some guidance about whether to provide test feedback to applicants and how specific that feedback should be. The American Psychological Association (APA)'s *Ethical Principles of Psychologists* specifies that applicants have the right to a full explanation of the nature and purpose of an assessment technique in language they can understand, unless the candidate has explicitly waived that right, and establish a procedure for ensuring the adequacy of the explanation (APA, 2002). The APA's *The Rights and Responsibilities of Test Takers: Guidelines for Testing Professionals* specifies that applicants receive a written or oral explanation of their test results within a reasonable amount of time after testing and in commonly understood terms (APA, 1998). This is also embedded in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (APA, 2014). The document emphasizes that the "rights and responsibilities" are neither legally based nor inalienable rights, but they represent good professional practice.

Pope (1992) summarized psychologists' responsibilities in providing psychological test feedback to the organization and to job candidates. He viewed feedback as a process that includes clarifying tasks and roles of the test giver and taker, ensuring that the test taker has given informed consent (or refusal) before taking the test, framing the feedback, acknowledging its fallibility, guarding against misuse and misinterpretation of the information, guarding the test results, and assessing and understanding important reactions. He emphasized that applicants and the organization have a right to understand the purpose and use for the assessment, the procedures involved, and the feedback they can expect and from whom.

The rights of test takers were controversial when they were first created. They seemed to ignore some of the realities of large-scale employment testing. For instance, the right expressed in the APA *Guidelines for Testing Professionals* for applicants to "have their test administered and their results interpreted by appropriately trained individuals who follow professional codes of ethics" (pt. 6.0) may not be possible when test administration personnel have no code of ethics or when feedback is delivered electronically to many people. These guidelines need to be contrasted with practice. In our experience, with the exception of some civil service agencies that may be required to provide feedback, most organizations within the United States do not follow the guidelines when it comes to selection tests. If feedback is given, it is usually at the "dimension" level, for instance, explaining to candidates that they did well in one area, say math, but had trouble with another area, such as mechanical comprehension. However, this is not the case everywhere. Organizations outside of the United States may be required to give more detailed feedback. For instance, the European Union (EU) Civil Service is required by law to provide more specific information on standing or scores. The European Personnel Selection Office specifies that applicants have a "right of access":

admission test applicants systematically obtain a list of the reference numbers/letters of the answers they gave together with a list of the reference numbers/letters of the correct answers; for the assessment center stage each applicant receives a competency passport which gives feedback on the marking of the general and job-specific competencies that were assessed.

(Bear, 2011, p. 7)

The EU personnel office offers initial self-screening devices that provide immediate feedback on each test question and final feedback, such as the EU's self-assessment, which may inform the successful test taker: "Your responses suggest that you have the right perception of the reality of the EU working environment" (Camilleri, 2014).

While feedback may vary across contexts and countries, the type and amount of feedback given may also vary by selection device. For example, feedback tends to be integral to the operation of ACs used for selection. The *Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations* were developed and endorsed by practitioners to delineate the key components and activities of an AC, including feedback (International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines, 2000). ACs combine a host of qualitative and quantitative data about candidates and are used for selection, promotion, and development for general management positions and for

specific functions and various industries, such as manufacturing, banking, and sales (Spychalski, Quiñones, Gaugler, & Pohley, 1997). Line managers are often trained as assessors and may also be charged with giving feedback to candidates. The *Guidelines* defines AC feedback as “information comparing actual performance to a standard or desired level of performance” (International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines, 2000, p. 10), indicating that applicants must receive information to help them understand their results. The organization using the AC should establish and publish a policy statement about the use of the data (e.g., who will receive reports, restrictions on access to information, planned uses for research and program evaluation, and feedback procedures). Assessor training should include “thorough knowledge and understanding of feedback procedures” as well as a “demonstrated ability to give accurate oral and written feedback, when the assessor’s role is to give feedback” (p. 10). Furthermore, guidelines for use of the data state the following:

1. Assesseees should receive feedback on their AC performance and should be informed of any recommendations made. Assesseees who are members of the organization have a right to read any written reports concerning their own performance and recommendations that are prepared and made available to management.
2. Applicants to an organization should be provided with, at a minimum, what the final recommendation is and, if possible and if requested by the applicant, the reason for the recommendation.
3. For reasons of test security, AC exercises and assessor reports on performance in particular exercises are exempted from disclosure, but the rationale and validity data concerning ratings of dimensions and the resulting recommendations should be made available upon request of the individual.
4. The organization should inform the assessee what records and data are being collected, maintained, used, and disseminated.
5. If the organization decides to use assessment results for purposes other than those originally announced and that can impact the assessee, the assessee must be informed and consent obtained. (p. 9)

The various guidelines reviewed above recognize selection feedback as valuable to the applicant, and indeed couch it in ethical terms—that applicants deserve to know the meaning of the information collected about them and how the information was used to make decisions about them. There is a growing body of research on applicants’ reactions to feedback that suggests the potential value of feedback to the applicant and the organization. We examine this literature next.

APPLICANTS’ REACTIONS TO FEEDBACK

Understanding how applicants react to feedback can help HR managers design feedback that will be beneficial to applicants and the organization. If administered appropriately, feedback may help applicants make decisions about whether to accept an offer, prepare them to re-apply, or make it more likely that they will recommend the organization to other qualified applicants. Also, feedback may reinforce or enhance applicants’ self-image, increase their self-awareness (accurately recognizing strengths and weaknesses), direct their development goals, and, at least, not do harm by damaging an individual’s self-image.

Ensuring that applicants respond favorably to test feedback begins with test development. Much research has examined which features of selection processes are most likely to result in positive applicant reactions toward the process and toward the test feedback. Work has also been devoted to examining the best ways to deliver feedback to ensure positive reactions. However, before we describe this research in more detail, we must provide information about this research area, more generally, and how this type of research has typically been conducted.

Much of the research on applicant reactions to feedback uses the justice framework to understand reactions to testing and feedback. *Distributive justice* refers to perceptions of the fairness (equity) of the outcomes of a selection process, whereas *procedural justice* refers to perceptions of the fairness of the process itself (Folger & Greenberg, 1985; Gilliland, 1993; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Applicants who receive negative feedback tend to rate the test less fair than those

who receive positive feedback (Lounsbury, Bobrow, & Jensen, 1989; Schleicher, Venkataramani, Morgeson, & Campion, 2006; Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman, & Stoffey, 1993).

Procedural justice may mediate the effects of favorability on outcomes such that the more fair the process is perceived, the more positive responses will be after the outcome is known, regardless of the outcome. Furthermore, several important organizational outcomes may be related to procedural justice perceptions of selection processes (Bauer et al., 2001). These include the attractiveness of the organization to applicants, applicant intentions toward the organization (e.g., recommending the company to others), and deciding to accept the organization's job offer.

However, there is still some debate regarding whether or not the effects of reactions extend beyond feelings and beliefs of applicants and to actual behavior. In their *Annual Review* article, Sackett and Lievens (2008) concluded, based on the meta-analysis of Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas (2004), that there was little evidence for a relationship between applicant reactions to the selection process and actual behavioral outcomes. However, other research indicates some statistically positive, although small, results. Truxillo, Steiner, and Gilliland (2004) reviewed the literature on the effects of selection fairness on organizational outcomes. They found that feelings of unfair treatment affect both "soft" outcomes such as satisfaction with the selection process and "hard" outcomes such as applicant withdrawal. Furthermore, McCarthy, Van Iddekinge, Lievens, Kung, Sinar, and Campion (2013) found that candidate reactions to tests were related to test scores and indirectly affected later job performance, providing evidence of the potential long-term effects of applicant reactions.

Research generally finds that selection processes that are designed to be fair and considerate to applicants lead to better reactions toward the results of the process. Ryan and Ployhart (2000) examined the literature on applicant perceptions of selection procedures, including the consequences of selection results and feedback. They found various factors that may influence reactions to the selection procedure, such as test type, HR policy, and the behavior of HR personnel, as well as selection results. They suggested that selection results and feedback operate within the larger context of conditions that affect applicant reactions. Ryan and Ployhart (2000) proposed that these conditions include personal characteristics (e.g., experience), job characteristics (e.g., attractiveness), procedural characteristics (reasonableness of explanation; job relatedness of the selection methods), and organizational context (e.g., selection ratio/competition). These affect applicants' perceptions about the selection process and outcome, depending on applicants' expectations, the perceived desirability of the job and organization, available alternative jobs, and social support.

Based on Ryan and Ployhart's (2000) review, organizations will want to be sure that applicants are clear about the purpose for the test before they even take it, and they should treat all applicants in a friendly and respectful manner, including the process of giving feedback. To support this, Maertz, Bauer, Mosley, Posthuma, and Campion (2004) found that procedural justice perceptions predicted organizational attractiveness and intention related to the organization prior to receiving pass-fail feedback, and this effect existed even after feedback was given, although the effect was not as strong.

Two things should be noted about the applicant reactions research we have described. First, the effect of reactions on outcomes tends to be small. However, one must remember that even small effects can have meaningful (and potentially disastrous) consequences when we consider thousands of applicants within one organization or across organizations. Just one lawsuit can cost an organization millions of dollars (and tarnish a reputation) and therefore applicant reactions have important and potentially large consequences when considered on this scale. Second, the research described has not examined reactions to feedback but reactions to selection processes in general. In most of the studies described above, the applicant was unaware of how he/she actually performed in the process.

Beyond designing selection processes to be perceived positively, one must also consider precisely how *feedback* should be delivered. Applicants' reactions to feedback need to be understood in relation to their perceptions and feelings about the context and process before, during, and after testing and feedback of results. The effects of assessment feedback may depend on conditions, such as applicants perceiving that there was strong competition or applicants already having excellent jobs, thereby providing an attribution beyond their own ability (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000).

Recognizing that the selection process involves evaluation, Ryan and Ployhart (2000) commented that reactions to tests are not merely reactions to the process but reactions to being evaluated.

Research supports this line of thinking. Job candidates' reactions to a test, what Schuler (1993) called "social validity," depend, in part, on the feedback they receive about their test performance. Thus, how test results are presented will influence how candidates interpret the meaning of the results and what they decide to do as a result, if anything (Marcus, 2003; Pope, 1992). Candidates' reactions to a test and the testing process may change after receiving feedback about whether they passed or failed the test. Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, and Campion (1998) assessed applicants' reactions before testing, after testing, and again after feedback about whether they passed or failed. They found that applicants who passed the test evaluated the organization and testing process more favorably than did those who failed. Wiechmann and Ryan (2003) found that feedback about the selection decision had a significant effect on reactions to the test, consistent with a self-serving bias. Candidates who were selected preferred to think that the test was fair and valid because this helped them maintain their self-image. Those who were not selected expressed a negative perception about the test because this diverted blame for the outcome from their own ability to behave effectively in the situation. In a laboratory study, applicants who failed to meet hiring standards had a more negative view of the organization than those who had passed (Kluger & Rothstein, 1993). In a study of actual applicants, those who performed more poorly rated the entire selection process more negatively than did those who performed well (Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994). Thus, those who receive negative feedback on test performance may automatically blame the test to protect their self-perceptions. However, if a test is perceived to be procedurally fair before receiving feedback, but applicants receive feedback that they did not perform well on the test, then this may cause applicants to feel incompetent and thereby lower their expectations of being able to perform on such tests in the future (Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999).

Bauer et al. (1998) found that feedback about test performance was more important than procedural justice perceptions as a determinant of organizational outcomes. In a laboratory study, Gilliland (1994) found that student applicants who were selected on the basis of their test results reported greater fairness in the selection process than did the rejected students, especially when they had high expectations of being hired. Applicants who were rejected were more likely to recommend application to others when they were offered an explanation for the use of the selection procedure. Feedback influenced the factors that were important in perceiving that the process was fair (Van Vienen et al., 2004). Explaining the selection decision to applicants has consistently been found to increase their perceptions of a fair selection process (Gilliland et al., 2001; Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999; Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Younce, 2009). Other research found that selection processes and results are likely to be perceived more fairly when applicants are given information about the process before being evaluated (Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002).

Individual differences may explain some variance in how feedback is received. Schinkel, van Dierendonck, van Vianen, and Ryan (2011) found that applicants with an optimistic attributional style (people perceive the cause for a positive event to be internal and stable and the cause of a negative event to be external and unstable) reported higher well-being after being rejected than those with a less optimistic style, particularly when feedback about test performance was unspecific. Specific performance feedback negatively affected rejected applicants' well-being. Receiving specific feedback seemed to lower the possibility of externally attributing a negative outcome, and this negatively affected feelings of well-being after being rejected, particularly if the individual was used to making external attributions for unfavorable outcomes. The implication is that feedback should be sufficiently specific to avoid inaccurate external attributions. However, for individuals who are rejected, being less specific can reduce negative feelings. This raises the dilemma of protecting the applicant's self-image or the organization's reputation as fair in hiring. Presumably the best policy is to explain the fairness of the process and provide specific feedback that may cause the applicant to feel bad, at least temporarily, but could lead to learning as well as maintaining the organization's reputation.

In summary, passing or failing a test contributes strongly to applicants' subsequent reactions (Bauer et al., 1998; Marcus, 2003; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Thorsteinson & Ryan, 1997): the more positive the results, the more favorable the reaction. Research suggests that applicants may prefer

detailed comments, as opposed to just knowing a test score (Anastasiya, Limnevich, & Smith, 2009). Conveying personal and procedural information sensitively contributes to more positive perceptions of the test and organization, whether the applicant was hired or not. Understanding the procedures may limit the negative effects of failing a test on self-perceptions. Feedback reactions are influenced by the context of the process (e.g., information about competition for the position; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). Praise may help applicants feel better about their performance but may not necessarily affect learning (Anastasiya et al., 2009).

Feedback and Self-Image

Generally, people do not perceive themselves accurately, or at least as others see them (London, 2003). Feedback helps them have an accurate perception of their performance and benefit from the selection process regardless of whether they are selected or not. Feedback supports candidates' self-learning by clarifying what good performance is, encouraging dialogue between testers and test takers, and suggesting ways that testers can improve their performance in the future (Nicola & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Job candidates are likely to perceive feedback as being accurate when the feedback is clear and objective, not based on ambiguous or subjective data (e.g., one assessor's or interviewer's opinions).

People tend to evaluate themselves positively to maintain or increase their self-image (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). They interpret feedback through their own lens; for instance, potentially attributing poor test results to factors outside of their control, such as an unfair testing procedure (Ployhart & Harold, 2004). In contrast, failing leads to lower self-image and self-perceptions of incompetence (Anderson & Goltsi, 2006; Fletcher, 1991; Maertz et al., 2005; McFarland & Ross, 1982; Ployhart & Harold, 2004; Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999).

Nicola and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggested that candidates are likely to evaluate their own performance during the testing process and create their own feedback in line with their self-image when feedback is not given. For instance, if they do not receive specific information about the results of a test and they were not chosen, they will rationalize that their rejection was not because of their test performance but because of other factors beyond their control. This allows them to maintain their self-image, but it may also create erroneous impressions that could be damaging to the organization—for instance, that the organization has unfair hiring or promotion practices. When the candidate is offered the job, the candidate is likely to attribute the cause to his or her good test performance, but not necessarily. The candidate with low self-esteem may erroneously conclude that the positive outcome was due to luck or other factors beyond his or her ability. In addition, the successful candidate could benefit from test results that suggest ways to improve his or her skills and knowledge to be even more valuable to the organization and increase his or her chances of job and career success. Hence, feedback should be provided to influence applicants' perceptions about the testing process and organization.

Social identity theory suggests how applicants' social identities interact with their perceptions of selection experiences to predict their withdrawal from the process. Herriot (2004) argued that applicants are likely to withdraw from the selection process when there is incongruence between their current perceptions of the organization's identity and their own self-identities that are salient during specific elements of the selection process. Social identities are individuals' beliefs about their membership in social categories (e.g., their gender, ethnicity, occupation, family, and religion), in contrast to their personal identities, which are beliefs about their own characteristics (e.g., their strengths and weaknesses). Social identities are associated with a range of beliefs, values, and norms of behavior, and may incorporate prototypes or beliefs about the typical or ideal member of a category. Organizational identities are subsets of social identities. Applicants develop perceptions about their organizational identity as they participate in the selection process and receive feedback. The effects of degree of congruence on leaving the process may be moderated by the applicants' perceptions of the probability of obtaining another job. People who believe there are plenty of other opportunities will have a lower threshold for incongruence. Those who believe that job opportunities are scarce are more likely to tolerate a higher level of incongruence.

Schinkel, van Dierendonck, and Anderson (2004) studied the role of feedback in minimizing the psychological effect of a negative selection decision on job applicants. Student subjects completed two tests and then received a rejection message. Half received just the rejection message and half received the rejection message and bogus performance feedback (the percentile, how they did relative to others). Core self-evaluations and affective well-being of the rejected students receiving performance feedback significantly decreased from before to after the testing and feedback compared with that of students in the rejection message-alone condition. Core self-evaluations actually increased for those who were rejected but were not given performance feedback, particularly if they saw the procedure as unfair. Procedural fairness (candidates' perceptions that they had a chance to demonstrate their performance and that the test was related to the job function) interacted with feedback to affect core self-evaluation; distributive fairness (the perception that the selection decision was correct) interacted with feedback to affect well-being. The authors suggested an attribution theoretic explanation for these results. The students may have showed a self-serving bias after receiving negative outcomes, attributing the negative outcome to external causes (e.g., unfair procedures that were not under their control), thereby maintaining their self-perceptions. This comparison made reducing the negative state following rejection even more important, following DeNisi and Kluger's (2000) concept that feedback entails a comparison.

Maertz, Bauer, Mosley, Posthuma, and Campion (2005) measured applicants' self-efficacy for cognitive ability testing before and immediately after the test and again after pass/fail feedback. The applicants were applying for a position at a utility company. Self-efficacy for the test prior to actually taking it was higher for men, applicants who had prior successful experiences with cognitive ability tests, and those who perceived the test to be valid and fair. Not surprisingly, self-efficacy for the test increased for those who passed it and decreased for those who failed. However, failing had a greater negative impact on subsequent self-efficacy for the test for women and Whites and a lower negative effect for those who had previously been hired based on ability tests. Gilliland (1994) found that perceptions of job-relatedness were negatively related to test-taking self-efficacy for applicants who failed but positively related to test-taking self-efficacy for those who passed. An implication of these findings is that those who fail the test and have significant decreases in self-efficacy because of it might tell others that the test was particularly difficult and discourage other potential applicants.

Maertz et al. (2005) suggested that organizations consider attribution-related or other interventions to bolster self-efficacy or to increase perceptions of fairness and test validity. This does not mean giving applicants an excuse to attribute negative results to factors beyond their control so they will feel better about the outcome. Rather, feedback and explanations could help applicants make accurate and useful attributions, for instance, to improve their skills or knowledge and/or to understand why the selection method suggests that they would not do well in the position. Also, test administrators should follow procedural justice rules and emphasize in pre-test preparation sessions the proven validity of the test for predicting job performance. These interventions may also enhance applicants' attraction to the organization. Deros, Born, and de Witte (2004) found that applicants valued and expected feedback. They argued that although applicants should not be deprived of their right to performance scores, perhaps performance measures after selection should not be provided or should be provided in ways that protect applicants' self-image; for instance, reminding them of the low selection ratio or that the position is not right for everyone and that knowing now is better than being unhappy later.

Anderson and Goltsi (2006) formulated the construct of negative psychological effects (NPEs) of selection and assessment methods upon applicants. They defined NPEs as follows:

Declines in applicant psychological well-being, general mental health, or core self-esteem that are inveterate, measurable, and statistically demonstrable, and that occur as a result of exposure to rejection decisions, violations of applicant rights, or unprofessional feedback given to applicants by recruiters, at any stage during organizational selection or promotion assessment procedures.

(p. 237)

They also defined positive psychological effects (PPEs) as increases in applicant psychological well being, general mental health, or core self-esteem that result from acceptance decisions,

perceived respect for applicant rights, or complementary feedback. Previous research had found that applicants participating in an assessment center experienced negative psychological effects (Fletcher, 1991). Anderson and Goltsi (2006) suggested that NPEs may be present for several weeks and months after receiving a negative selection decision. They noted that much of the research on applicant reactions to selection methods has focused on applicants' immediate reactions and preference perceptions to different predictors. This study investigated the long-term effects and outcomes of applicants' exposure to specific selection methods on candidate decision making, attitudes toward the organization, and psychological health and well-being. For instance, measures included self-esteem, mental health, positive and negative affect, and career exploration behavior. One hundred seven applicants participating in an assessment center completed measures just before participating in the center, immediately afterward but before they were told the outcome, and six months after the assessment. All applicants received detailed feedback regardless of whether they were accepted or not. Rejected applicants did not differ significantly from accepted applicants on the indices of NPEs. Accepted applicants rated feedback dimensions more favorably than did rejected applicants. Rejected applicants seemed to attribute the negative decision to a lack of accuracy in the assessment process. The authors thought that one reason why NPEs did not emerge for unsuccessful candidates may have been that the selection ratio was so competitive in this organization that this may have moderated applicants' negative feelings from rejection. An implication is that providing detailed feedback to unsuccessful candidates may be dysfunctional. For internal applicants, rejected applicants remain in the organization, and NPEs could affect their job performance. This could also apply to successful applicants who received inappropriately negative feedback or felt that they were not treated fairly in some way.

In summary, unfavorable feedback may have a negative effect on applicants' self-image. Organizations should investigate the costs of potential NPEs on reduced performance and at least consider the possible long-term negative consequences from rejection. Organizations should make all the external reasons for a negative hiring decision salient (e.g., low selection ratio, high quality of other applicants, fit issues, etc.), so that negative feedback does not negatively affect a person's self-image.

The research on self-image is consistent with findings within the applicant reactions literature. These two literatures lead to clear advice regarding how to design selection processes to maximize positive reactions and outcomes for both the organization and test takers:

- Provide information about the fairness of the testing and decision-making process.
- Ensure the selection process is designed in such a way that the applicants feel like they have an opportunity to show their strengths and perform at their best.
- Focus on implications of the results for behaviors, knowledge, or skills that can be changed or learned, not personal characteristics, such as personality or cognitive ability, that threaten self-image.
- Tie feedback to job requirements and developmental opportunities.
- Precede feedback with information about the selection test to explain its job relevance and fairness.
- Accompany feedback with behavior-based standards in relation to job knowledge, abilities, and experiences required for success on the job.
- Explain why the test was fair to avoid applicants creating their own judgments about fairness.
- Convey personal and procedural information sensitively to generate more positive perceptions of the test and organization, whether the applicant was hired or not.
- Explain reasons for test methods and results to promote accurate attributions and judgments of test fairness and validity.
- Protect applicants' self-image (e.g., remind them of the difficulty of the test, the tough competition, and the value of knowing now that the job is not right for them).
- Recognize that machine-delivered feedback may require more explanation than face-to-face feedback to convey the meaning and intention.

BENEFITS AND COSTS OF FEEDBACK

People generally do not react positively to feedback. They are naturally apprehensive about being evaluated and are concerned about what others think of them (London, 2003). However,

feedback can direct behavior by helping people set and recalibrate goals and determine what they need to do to achieve their goals. Feedback can be motivating, by giving people a sense of what they have accomplished and a feeling of reward for their achievements. Feedback from selection tests can inform candidates about whether their ambitions were realistic and what they need to do to increase their preparedness in the future. As such, feedback can contribute to development and career planning.

The dilemma for the organization is deciding the level of specificity for feedback to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs to the organization and the individual. Here we consider the costs and benefits of feedback from the perspectives of the organization and the individual candidate.

Organization's Perspective

Potential benefits of feedback for the organization include the following:

- *Feedback informs the candidates' decision making.* Candidates who are selected will have a better understanding of why and the value the organization believes they will bring to their positions.
- *Knowing that candidates will receive feedback requires the organization to maintain focus on the skills and knowledge needed by the successful candidate(s).* These characteristics may reflect skills needed to do the job today and/or needed for future career advancement in the organization. Maintaining this focus is especially important when decisions are based on qualitative information, such as interviews and supervisory opinions.
- *Feedback is a way to maximize value from assessment dollars.* Considerable time and money may be spent evaluating candidates. This information can be useful not only for making the decision but also for guiding candidates' future development.
- *Feedback may guard against illegal discrimination and defend against claims of such* in that feedback recipients will know and understand the reason for the selection process and decision, see its job relevance, and recognize that it was not arbitrary or based on something other than bona fide job requirements.

Regarding potential costs of feedback, the organization needs to consider the following:

- *The organization incurs the cost of delivering feedback.* This may include the cost of personnel, such as a coach, who meets with the candidates after the selection process is concluded to explain the decision and provide the feedback.
- *Feedback may create difficulties in maintaining the reliability and validity of the assessment methods.* For instance, if candidates know the test content, they may communicate this to others, giving future candidates an unfair advantage, or causing them to respond in certain ways to create impressions they feel the organization wants, thereby limiting the accuracy of the information.
- *Test security is costly, and feedback that goes beyond test outcomes may make security difficult.* Having alternate forms of the selection process may eliminate this worry but adds a further cost to create and validate these forms.
- *The organization may be obliged to go beyond feedback to include advice for development.* Such advice needs to be given in a way that does not lead the candidates to have expectations about future opportunities; for instance, implying that if they follow the advice, they will be promoted.
- *Guarding candidates' confidentiality is also a cost.* Candidates should be told about who has access to the assessment results, how the information will be used by the organization, how long it will be retained, and how identifying information will be secured.
- *Giving feedback imposes obligations to follow up, especially with internal employees.* The employees may want career advice in the future. Such feedback and career counseling can be linked to a career development function in the organization.
- *The issue of longevity of assessment results needs to be examined by the organization.* Feedback indicates the value of the information for development, implying that the organization recognizes that people grow and develop over time. However, reassessment for future career opportunities is costly. The organization will want to study changes in assessment performance over time when varying degrees of development have occurred; for instance, differences in performance between candidates who have received feedback and those who have not and differences in performance between candidates who subsequently participated in various developmental experiences compared to those who did not. Such research is an additional but worthwhile cost in increasing the value of the assessment.

Candidate's Perspective

Potential benefits of feedback for the candidate include the following:

- *Increase in self-awareness.* In general, the benefit of feedback is to increase self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, identify competencies and experiences needed to increase competitiveness for future positions, and learn areas needing development to be more effective once on the job.
- *Feedback may help candidates who are offered positions understand the nature of the work and expectations.* Details about passing assessment results will show them the characteristics that are valued by the organization for the job and/or for their careers. Such detailed feedback, if provided, would contain information about strengths and weaknesses and suggest areas for improvement although they have been offered a job.
- *The way they are treated, the information they are given about themselves and the selection process, and their conclusions about the fairness and validity of the process will help them evaluate the organization.* The feedback may suggest that the organization cares about and is aware of their abilities and will support their continuous learning. For individuals who were rejected, the information explains why, affects their beliefs that the decision was made fairly and on the basis of relevant information, and they can benefit by using the information to recognize their strengths and weaknesses to focus their future job search and development.
- *Assessment feedback should include not only information about results but also ideas for development of weaknesses and ways to build on one's strengths.* The feedback recipients should understand differences between performance areas that can be developed and those that are difficult to develop. For performance areas that are difficult to develop, candidates might value suggestions about how to avoid behaviors and responsibilities that require ability in these areas.

Potential costs of feedback for the individual candidate include the following:

- *Possible decline in self-confidence.* Perhaps the major cost of feedback from the individual's perspective, particularly for those who are not offered positions, is losing face and declining self-confidence. Generally, less specific information will be less threatening but of less value.
- *Another potential cost is processing the information.* This takes time, energy, and motivation—sometimes more than the individual cares to give. Perhaps the applicant was not highly motivated to apply for the position to begin with. Or perhaps the individual knew from the start that this was a long shot. This person does not need to hear more than he or she was not offered the job. However, perhaps more information may redirect the candidate's time and attention toward more fruitful opportunities in the future.
- *The results may lead the candidate to make a disappointing career decision.* Candidates who get positive results may be flattered by the job offer and not pay attention to details of the feedback—or hear just about their strengths and ignore or give less attention to any weaknesses. Also, they may not pay sufficient attention to the nature of the job, instead focusing on their own competence. As a result, they may accept a position that may have requirements (e.g., travel) that they really did not want. Conversely, candidates who are rejected may focus on the rejection decision and not be able to process feedback about their personal characteristics mindfully.

Differences Between Internal and External Candidates

The costs and benefits may differ depending on whether the candidates are internal or external to the organization. If internal, the organization wants to maintain the loyalty and motivation of the employee and enhance the individual's career development with the organization. Moreover, communicating reasons for selecting certain candidates and bypassing others lets the candidates and other stakeholders (internal and external) know what is important to the organization. Internal candidates who were not selected will expect a rationale and may appreciate and take advantage of advice to direct their development and improve their future career development opportunities within the organization. External candidates may not need as much information. Still, as described above, their reactions to the fairness and thoroughness of the selection process and the validity of the decision may affect their impressions of the organization and their subsequent relationships with the organization.

Feedback Opportunities for Different Assessment Methods

Assessment methods vary in the nature of the data they collect and their difficulty in interpreting feedback results and applying the information for development. They differ in quantitative and qualitative results, the face validity of the methods, and their usefulness for improving performance and future selection prospects. Consider the following methods:

- *Interviews.* Interview results are difficult to quantify. Situational judgment interviews (SJIs) may provide sample “normative” responses for comparison with individual candidates’ answers.
- *Cognitive and personality tests.* These produce objective results that can be explained by subject area, percentiles, and norms within the company and with national samples.
- *Integrity tests.* Honest feedback on integrity tests could generate some really negative reactions. Test administrators may need to justify the use of integrity tests for candidates or, more simply, say in a tactful way that the results did not conform to the pattern that the organization wanted without divulging the nature of the test.
- *Test batteries.* Test batteries vary in their measures, some including personality and ability tests. They produce complex results and may require professional input to integrate and summarize. Electronic, pre-written feedback could be developed, but if not accompanied by face-to-face explanation and coaching, it may not be sufficient for applicants to gain useful and accurate understanding of the results.
- *Biodata.* Past behavior is an excellent predictor of future behavior. Biodata results can be justified in terms of experience needed. This method may be valuable in guiding failed candidates to better preparatory experiences.
- *AC measures of management and leadership skills.* ACs produce complex results and allow in-depth feedback, focusing candidates’ attention on weaknesses that can be corrected and strengths that suggest alternative career directions. These can be delivered to the candidate online immediately or soon after an online AC.
- *Multisource (360-degree) feedback survey results.* This method of collecting performance ratings from subordinates, supervisors, peers, and/or customers as well as self-ratings is often used alone for development. When used for decision making, the results can be related to other performance data and/or to changes in performance ratings from different sources over time. An executive coach may assist in providing the feedback and encouraging the recipient to interpret it accurately.
- *Supervisor nominations and evaluations.* When used as sole input for a placement or promotion decision, candidates may perceive nominations and performance evaluations as unfair. This may increase their political behavior and impression management in hopes of winning favor for future positive decisions.
- *Performance in a management/leadership development program.* Participation in a management development program may indicate performance capabilities in areas in which the candidates may not have had a chance to demonstrate their abilities on the job. The participants would likely perceive the use of such results for making decisions about them as unfair unless this purpose was evident before they participated in the program. Also, the experiential situations in such a program may be viewed as artificial and not a good representation of actual job performance.

Computerized Assessments and Feedback

Online assessments can be cost effective and flexible. There is a considerable literature on the use of technological applications for selection, including online assessments with simulations that vary in fidelity (e.g., high-fidelity assessments with simulations and work samples that require decisions or actions compared to low-fidelity assessments that are hypothetical situational judgment tests) (Lievens & De Soete, 2012; Tippins, 2015). These assessments can be customized to assess various abilities and behaviors. For instance, they can present realistic scenarios to candidates via full-motion video and ask candidates how they would respond to the different situations (Dragow, Olsen, Keenan, Moberg, & Mean, 1993; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). Technology-based selection methods that are new and unfamiliar (e.g., avatar-based situational judgment tests) are especially likely to produce negative reactions on the part of candidates who are rejected (Anderson, 2003; Bruk-Lee, Drew, & Hawkes, 2013; Oostrom, Born, & van de Molen, 2013). However, test takers’ post-test, post-feedback reactions to the tests are not affected by mode of administration (computer vs. paper-and-pencil test; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003).

Just as assessments can be computerized, so can the feedback. This may be less threatening than receiving feedback from an individual, but it also presents an opportunity to avoid paying attention to the results, which is more difficult with in-person feedback. Computerized feedback can be given at different points of time during the assessment or at the end, along with information about alternative response possibilities. Although these are simulations, they are realistic, standardized, and easy to administer. Of course, the computerized feedback can be combined with in-person feedback to help the candidate use the information.

There is a growing body of research comparing receiving feedback via computer to receiving feedback face-to-face. For instance, Watts (2007) noted that computer-mediated communication makes delivering evaluative feedback immediate and detailed. She compared the effects of feedback via e-mail with voicemail from the perspective of the sender and receiver in a study of evening MBA students delivering feedback that they generated themselves in relation to fellow students' participation in a group project. E-mail produced fewer social context cues than voicemail, so e-mail increased the negative content of feedback, filtering out the affect of the sender and receiver. E-mail senders viewed the negative feedback they gave as more negative than the receivers viewed the feedback. This was not the case for voicemail senders. However, voicemail senders, but not e-mail senders, were less comfortable than receivers with the negative feedback. Media conditions did not influence feedback effectiveness (e.g., the perception that the feedback motivated the receiver to work harder next time).

Mishra (2006) addressed whether people respond similarly to computer feedback about their abilities as they do to human feedback. Students participated in a laboratory study in which they were assigned randomly to one of four experimental conditions: scored test versus unscored test crossed with two levels of computer-generated feedback: (a) praise for success on easy task and no blame for failure on a difficult task or (b) no praise for success on an easy task and blame for failure on a difficult task. Participants who received computer-generated feedback seemed unwilling to commit to the same level of "deep psychological processing" about the intention of the feedback as other studies found with face-to-face feedback (e.g., Meyer, Mittag, & Engler, 1986). This was contrary to the position that people learn to respond to computers as social actors with whom they interact in real time using natural language fulfilling traditional social roles. The students in Mishra's study seemed to disregard the context within which the feedback was offered. They saw praise from the computer as being positive, regardless of whether or not they thought that their ability level was known or whether the task was easy or difficult.

If people respond more mindlessly to computer feedback about their test scores, this could thwart the goals of the feedback; for instance, to motivate higher achievement next time or to take the difficulty of the task into account when receiving praise. However, research is needed to determine if providing feedback recipients with a social script that suggests that the computer is capable of sophisticated inferences; for instance, that the computer "respects" the subject's intelligence because the computer has a record of information about the subject and takes that into account in providing feedback. Ferdig and Mishra (2004) explored the technology as a social actor, finding that people exhibited emotional responses (e.g., anger and spite) when they felt that the computer had treated them unfairly in an ultimatum bargaining game.

Feedback, Test Preparation, and Coaching

Test feedback provides opportunities for career development. More specifically, it focuses the candidates' attention on ways to increase opportunities and also avoid errors or failures in areas that were critical to the selection process. Feedback's main value is correcting errors. Providing test feedback suggests ways that the feedback recipients can increase their knowledge and avoid similar errors in the future. Feedback that is directed at the retrieval and application of specific knowledge stimulates recipients to correct errors when they recognize (are mindfully focused) on correcting or avoiding these errors in similar testing situations (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991). However, another possibility to consider in future research is that feedback may have a deleterious effect if it focuses candidates' attention on areas that will

not be as important in future situations. For instance, what was important for a given position in one organization may be different than what is needed for another position in a different organization, even if the positions are similar. Also, feedback may focus attention on areas that detract from current performance. For instance, the candidates may concentrate on improving their weaknesses or maximizing strengths that were important for a promotion but may not be as important in their job. They may behave as if they were promoted or were working on a different job and ignore current job requirements (anticipatory socialization).

FEEDBACK TO UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Unemployed individuals may be especially sensitive to job search outcomes, including feedback on selection tests or the absence of feedback. The job search literature on unemployed individuals indicates the negative effects of disappointing job search results on mental health (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Basbug, VanHooft, & Samtani, 2012). Personality characteristics, such as a positive self-concept, perceived control, and emotional stability affect continued job search despite rejections along the way (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). Few studies have examined the effects of feedback, or lack thereof, on unemployed individuals although they do recognize that outcomes beyond time to re-employment need to be studied (Wanberg, Kanfer, Hamman, & Zhang; 2015). A qualitative study quoted unemployed individuals' desire for feedback (Wanberg, Basbug, VanHooft, & Samtani, 2012, p. 900):

“I just wish there was more feedback available so that you could grow constructively and, you know, optimize your next time.”

“I don't think you ever get the true reason you were rejected. So like I said, it's the lack of information, the lack of feedback that frustrates me, and that happens daily.”

“The most help that I need is to know why things didn't go the way I wanted them to. And even if somebody says no, I can handle that; that's not a problem; I don't mind that a bit; as long as you tell me why.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Practitioners need to make fundamental decisions about giving feedback, recognizing that feedback may affect applicants' reactions to the testing situation, the organization, and their self-image. Also, in divulging test results, practitioners worry about guarding the security of the test and minimizing costs relative to the gains from feedback. Specifically, practitioners need to determine if and when feedback should be given, by whom (or by what means), or by what medium (e.g., face-to-face, letter, e-mail). They also need to consider how much detail should be given and the form of score reporting (e.g., raw score, percentiles, standard scores, etc.). Other questions involve the relevant comparison groups (e.g., other candidates, other people with similar ability and background) and what resources should be provided to assist applicants in interpreting the feedback and using the information for their development. Organizations may be more likely to invest in hiring an assessor or coach to convey and discuss results with applicants when the assessment is for current employees vying for another position in the organization.

Overall, HR practitioners need to foster applicants' perceptions that the selection process and outcome are fair, guard against erroneous attributions about the organization, and protect applicants' self-image. In addition, practitioners need to guard the security of the test and minimize cost as they make feedback a positive part of the selection process. Also, candidates are not accountable for using the feedback. Candidates need to be made aware that it is available. The organization then needs to provide a setting that is conducive to delivering feedback, including the format for the feedback. The decision about format, setting, and feedback specificity depends on the test developer's and administrator's conclusions about their ethical obligation to provide feedback and to do so in a manner that does not do harm to the candidates, at the very least, and hopefully benefits them. The dilemma is how to maximize the benefits and

minimize the costs to the organization and the recipients. This is likely to be a balance between candor and confidentiality. It may also require customizing the feedback to suit the candidates. Some may welcome feedback; others may avoid it. Those who want more detail can be given the information. Precautions should be taken to guard the assessment information to protect its usefulness to the organization (e.g., do not hand the test and scores to applicants) as well as deliver the results in a sensitive way that takes into account the recipient's ability to comprehend the information. This may require hiring and training an assessor or coach to convey and discuss the results with the applicant. The organization must also determine its obligation to follow up after the feedback is delivered. Follow-up questions can benefit the individual by ensuring that harm was not done and possibly providing further coaching or career guidance. Follow-up can benefit the organization by asking candidates for their perceptions of the fairness of the selection process and their feelings about the organization.

Organizations that routinely provide assessment feedback to internal candidates are likely to foster a continuous learning culture that includes accepting and understanding performance feedback and seeking areas for performance improvement and career development. Feedback recipients learn to evaluate the feedback results for themselves and share it with others, perhaps their coworkers, as a way of validating the results and seeking ways to apply the information for their continued professional growth. Clear communication about the assessment method and how the results are used is important.

Professionals responsible for deciding what and how assessment results are fed back to applicants need to consider not only the cost of divulging information about the test and results from the standpoint of the organization but also the individual's ability to understand and benefit from the information. Organizations should track changes in performance over time at the individual and organizational level. Also, organizations can collect data to show the added value of selection feedback and its joint effects with other interventions, such as coaching, training, career paths, online developmental resources, etc.

Returning to the three cases that we introduced at the outset of this chapter, here is how the organizations answered the questions about whether to provide feedback, how much, and in what form.

AC Feedback

The consulting firm that used an AC to help select recent MBA graduates for entry-level positions decided to inform the candidates that feedback would be given one week after the online assessment. Although some test results would be available to the firm immediately, on the basis of computer scoring, the exercises would provide qualitative results that the firm wanted to examine and integrate with all of the information about the candidates. Observers who reviewed the transactions would record some feedback on each exercise. The feedback would be available to candidates who passed the assessment and those who did not, although the nature of the feedback and tenor of the conversation would differ. Those who passed and were offered jobs were told about developmental experiences that would help them use the feedback for development in relation to the nature of the work they would be doing and the organization's performance expectations—essentially, a realistic job preview. Consistent with the results reviewed above, applicants who were not offered positions were given the information in a way that did not damage their self-image (e.g., suggested that this job may not have been right for them) and that pointed to behaviors they could develop.

The firm asked the candidates not to describe the details of the selection process with others, although they may want to reveal the results to others who could be helpful in their job search (e.g., their academic advisor or a friend or career mentor). The feedback included information about how the data would be retained and protected. For selected candidates who accepted a position, this included making the assessment results available to the individual's new manager and the HR director, who would track the individual's career and developmental assignments. For candidates who failed the assessment, the data would be retained for a year under lock and key in case the individual wanted to apply for another position with the firm.

Test Feedback

The restaurant hiring food service personnel using several evaluation sources (a biodata form, an integrity test, and an interview) provided a written report for individuals who were offered jobs. Those who were not hired were given information about the nature of the assessment to help them realize that the selection methods were fair and related to the position. They were also given a summary statement of results written in relation to job requirements (e.g., “This job requires a person to keep records accurately.”) without providing the individual’s actual results. Pains were taken not to divulge the nature or purpose of specific aspects of the selection process.

Individual Assessment for Executive Selection

The consumer products company hiring a marketing vice president asked the personnel psychologist who created and administered the assessment process to prepare separate feedback reports for the company and the candidates. All of the candidates had the option of requesting a feedback report, which would be delivered in person by the psychologist. The feedback reports would be available only after the decision was made and a candidate accepted the job offer. The successful candidate would receive a more detailed, career-oriented report that would be the start of an ongoing developmental coaching experience with the psychologist or another external coach at the discretion of the new vice president.

Note that these cases suggest that rejected applicants receive less detailed feedback than those who are accepted. This may be normative and have in mind protecting applicants’ self-image, their perception of the selection method’s fairness and validity, and their positive feelings about the organization, as well as limiting the resources the organization devotes to those who will not be employed. However, standards of best practice, as we described at the outset of this chapter, specify the importance of clear feedback and that giving feedback to applicants should be incorporated into the design of the selection method. Human resource professionals need to do this in a way that takes into account applicants’ affective reactions and the potential value of the results for their career development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

More research is needed on applicant reactions measured after they receive feedback and comparing those who received negative feedback in addition to those who received positive feedback. Applied research can evaluate the effects of feedback along with the effects of other aspects of the selection process, such as explaining the process to demonstrate its fairness and relevance to the position and providing realistic job previews before and/or after the assessment to guide candidates’ decisions. Such applied research can be part of the design of a selection process. The effects of feedback on continued reliability and validity of an assessment process should also be determined. These data can be used for ongoing program improvement.

Potential group differences in reactions to feedback should also be explored. Studying job performance feedback, Roberts and Noeln-Hoeksema (1994) reported that women were more likely than men to report lower self-esteem and intention to change behavior after they received negative feedback. Similarly, Johnson and Helgeson (2002) found that women’s self-esteem declined significantly after receiving negative feedback and increased slightly after receiving positive feedback while men’s self-esteem was not affected by the favorability of feedback. Generally, women are more self-aware and are more sensitive to feedback than are men (Fletcher, 1999; London & Wohlers, 1991). Men have an inflated self-assessment that may explain why they discount evaluative feedback more than women (Cleveland, Lim, & Murphy, 2007; Vecchio & Anderson, 2009); however, because of this, women may be more likely to process feedback mindfully, react to it, and change behavior because of it. Furthermore, research suggests that women may react differently to feedback depending on whether the job in question is

traditionally male-dominated or female-dominated (London, Downey, Romero-Canvas, Rattan, & Tyson, 2012). Research should examine how specific versus more generic feedback affects reactions of males and females depending on the type of job for which one applies.

Basic research should explore the effects of anticipated and actual feedback on candidates' perceptions, test performance, and career development and decisions. This should include studying candidate's reactions to feedback as an impression-making opportunity. The effects of feedback on later job applications (for both the employed and unemployed), participation in development, and assessment performance should be studied. Other research should examine the extent to which the expectation of receiving feedback influences assessment performance. Generally, we need to study how people process positive and negative assessment feedback and the effects of the feedback on their making of career decisions. Other areas for investigation include understanding how assessment feedback interacts with candidates' demographic characteristics (age, gender, minority status, cultural background, career stage), organizational characteristics (size, growth history, reputation for treating employees), and the nature of the assessment data (qualitative or quantitative, detailed or general, and accompanied by coaching and availability of developmental resources such as training programs for internal candidates).

CONCLUSIONS

Feedback of assessment results is a complex process involving issues of information security and professional accountability as well as development. Professional standards suggest that developers of selection tests and other assessment methods are obligated to provide some feedback, if only to explain the selection method and rationale for the outcome. Feedback also affects candidates' reactions to the selection process, which in turn may affect their decisions about the organization and their development goals. Feedback can benefit the candidates and the organization, but precautions must be taken to guard the confidentiality of the information and protect the self-image of the feedback recipient. The organization must determine the level of feedback specificity that is in the best interests of the organization and the candidates. Internal and external candidates may be treated differently, providing more details and developmental support to internal candidates and offering external candidates optional feedback and help interpreting the results. To be constructive, feedback can focus on implications of the results for behaviors, not personal characteristics that threaten self-image. Moreover, feedback can be tied to job requirements and developmental opportunities. Feedback can be preceded by information about the selection test when possible to explain its job relevance and fairness. Furthermore, feedback can be accompanied by behavior-based standards, not merely comparisons to others but standards in relation to job knowledge, abilities, and experiences that are required for the job and that predict success on the job. Feedback should not be given without adequate support for using the information and ensuring that the candidate was not harmed by the information. Although assessment feedback has potential costs to the candidate and the organization, the benefit of assessment results can be maximized by recognizing its value for selection and development.

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