For some people, work means interacting with a boss that they can never seem to please. These individuals may feel like no matter what they do, it is never good enough. In other words, many subordinates perceive their manager to be perfectionists—individuals with unrealistically high standards and who are overly critical of mistakes (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). These perceptions are important, as viewing a manager as perfectionistic has been linked to a range of negative outcomes for both subordinates and organizations, such as withholding creative ideas and second-guessing decisions out of fear of harsh criticism (Ocampo et al., 2024). In some cases, perceiving one's manager to be highly perfectionist may even lead to violation of ethical norms and company policies (Zhang et al., 2022). Yet despite these negative consequences, no research to date has examined the antecedents of subordinate perceptions of manager perfectionism. To mitigate the negative outcomes that can result when subordinates perceive their manager to be a perfectionist, it is necessary to understand how subordinates come to form that perception.

To this end, we draw on the Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM; Funder, 1995) to explain how subordinates form perceptions of their manager's perfectionism. According to RAM, people form perceptions of others personality by relying on behavioral cues that are observable and relevant to the trait being judged (Funder, 1995). Along these lines, we argue that the feedback that managers' deliver to subordinates is a cue signalling their perfectionism. Specifically, we argue that the *feedback environment* is an important determinant of subordinate judgments about a manager's perfectionism. Feedback environment is defined as the degree to which feedback is available, credible, high-quality, and sensitive (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003; Steelman et al., 2004). Dahling et al. (2017) found that feedback falls into three patterns: some managers give clear, helpful feedback (high-quality), some give somewhat clear and helpful feedback (moderate quality), and others provide very little feedback, and the extent to which they do, primarily point

out mistakes (unfavorable). In other words, in unfavorable feedback environments subordinates receive almost exclusively feedback about what they have done *wrong*. As such, we argue that subordinates in unfavorable feedback environments perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism, relative to subordinates in high and moderate feedback environments.

Nonetheless, we expect the degree to which feedback environments influence the perception of manager perfectionism to vary across subordinates. According to RAM, people differ in how good of a judge they are when forming personality judgments, based on their ability to detect and interpret behavioral cues (Funder, 1995). Similarly, subordinates differ in the extent to which they attend to and process the feedback cues they receive from their manager. We therefore expect subordinate *feedback orientation* to moderate the relationship between the feedback environment and perceptions of manager perfectionism. Feedback orientation refers to the extent to which subordinates perceive feedback as useful, act on it, attend to social information, and feel capable of responding appropriately (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). Accordingly, we suggest that subordinates with strong feedback orientations will be better at detecting and interpreting cues in the feedback environment, relative to subordinates with weaker feedback orientations. As a result, the association between feedback environment and perceived manager perfectionism is stronger among subordinates with higher feedback orientation.

Downstream, perceptions of manager perfectionism are expected to shape what subordinates prioritize at work. Although prior research documents negative consequences of perceiving one's manager as perfectionistic, this work remains fragmented and focuses primarily on behavioral outcomes such as creativity. As a result, little is known about how these perceptions influence employees' motivational orientations that guide their work priorities. To address this gap, we draw on Motivated Action Theory (MAT; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). MAT

posits that situational cues influence the goals individuals pursue, such that exposure to the same cues leads them to prioritize certain goals. We argue that perceiving a manager as a perfectionist provides cues signaling that mistakes are costly and demonstrating competence is important. Consequently, such cues are expected to orient subordinates toward goals centered on proving competence and avoiding failure. To this end, goal orientation refers to individuals' focus on developing new skills (mastery), demonstrating existing skills (performance-prove), and avoiding displaying a lack of skill (performance-avoid) (Vandewalle, 1997). Accordingly, we predict a negative relationship between perceptions of manager perfectionism and mastery goal orientation, and positive relationships with performance-prove and -avoid goal orientations.

We tested these predictions using a multi-wave, correlational study. This research makes three contributions to the perfectionism literature. First, prior research has focused on the consequences of manager perfectionism and has given little attention to how subordinates come to form these perceptions. The present study identifies the feedback environment as an antecedent of perceived manager perfectionism. Second, by drawing on motivated action theory, this research moves beyond specific behavioral outcomes and examines how perceptions of manager perfectionism shape subordinates' goal orientation. In doing so, we highlight a motivational mechanism through which manager perfectionism may influence how employees approach achievement situations. Third, this research offers practical value by showing that some feedback environments are linked to stronger perceptions of manager perfectionism, suggesting that organizations could reduce these perceptions by changing how feedback is delivered.

Perfectionism at Work

Perfectionism is a personality trait defined by the tendency to set excessively high standards and to be highly critical when those standards are not met (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Researchers have proposed multiple conceptualizations of perfectionism, each differing in the number and nature of their dimensions. For instance, Frost et al. (1990) identified six facets of perfectionism, whereas Hewitt and Flett (1991) advanced a three-dimensional model. Despite these differences, recent work shows that these models greatly overlap. By examining the shared variance among these conceptualizations, researchers have identified two higher-order factors that capture the structure of perfectionism: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Frost et al., 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Perfectionistic strivings capture the aspects of perfectionism characterized by exceedingly high personal standards and a strong drive to attain perfection. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns capture the aspects characterized by persistent concern over mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and feelings of discrepancy between one's standards and actual performance.

However, this two-factor framework largely conceptualizes perfectionism as self-directed (*intrapersonal*), focusing on how individuals impose demanding standards on themselves (Ocampo et al., 2020, Harari et al., 2018). Importantly, perfectionism is not solely intrapersonal; it can also be directed toward others (*interpersonal*). Indeed, Hewitt and Flett (1991) identified an interpersonal dimension of perfectionism, termed other-oriented perfectionism (OOP), in which high standards and concerns over mistakes are imposed on others. Research on this dimension conceptualizes OOP as a "dark" form of perfectionism, linked to narcissistic, antisocial, and uncaring personality traits (Stoeber, 2015). Initial work associated OOP with domineering tendencies, hostility, and a propensity to blame others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Subsequent research also shows that individuals high in OOP report low interest in helping or supporting others (Stoeber, 2014), tend to be unempathetic and verbally aggressive, and exhibit difficulties regulating their temper, often expressing aggression when frustrated (Stoeber et al., 2017).

Given these implications, there has been a growing interest in examining the effects of OOP at work, particularly the effects of manager perfectionism on subordinates (Ocampo et al., 2020). This interest stems from two features of organizational contexts. First, workplace structures are hierarchical in nature, and managers are conferred formal authority to set standards and evaluate subordinates (Courtright et al., 2015). This gives managers the ability to impose unrealistic standards on their subordinates. Second, workplaces are characterized by increasing interdependence, such that subordinates' performance directly affects managers' outcomes (Courtright et al., 2015). As a result, managers may become sensitive to subordinate mistakes and demand flawless performance.

Not surprisingly, findings from this line of work show that the consequences of manager perfectionism on subordinates are largely detrimental. For instance, compared with subordinates who perceive lower levels of manager perfectionism, those who perceive higher levels report lower creativity and innovation, reduced creative performance, and lower psychological safety (Xu et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2025; Ocampo et al., 2024). They also report greater supervisor–subordinate relationship conflict and higher levels of deviant behavior (Wang et al., 2024). In addition, this perception is associated with increased unethical pro-organizational behavior (Jiang et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that perceiving one's manager as highly perfectionistic has negative consequence on performance, organizational and interpersonal outcomes.

Despite these negative outcomes, there is little research examining what drives employees' perceptions of their managers' perfectionism. That is, it remains unknown how subordinates come to perceive their manager as high in perfectionism. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify a source of these perceptions. To do so, we draw on the Realistic Accuracy Model to explain how people form judgments about others' personality traits.

`Forming Personality Judgments at Work: The Realistic Accuracy Model

The Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM; Funder, 1995) describes the process by which people come to perceive others' personality traits. It proposes that personality judgments occur when cues about a trait are expressed by the person being evaluated (the target) and perceived by the person forming the evaluation (the judge). Specifically, the model outlines four stages through which this process unfolds: relevance, availability, detection, and utilization.

The first stage, *relevance*, states that the environment must allow the target to express trait-relevant behavior (Letzring & Funder, 2021). That is, personality traits cannot be judged unless they are manifested in observable action. For example, for a subordinate to make a judgment of their manager's perfectionism, the manager must do something that reflects perfectionism. If the environment does not allow a manager high in perfectionism to express a behavior relevant to the trait, then there are no cues available for the subordinate to form that perception. Therefore, this stage requires the target to express behavior relevant to the trait, as trait judgments can only occur when such behavior is displayed.

The second stage, availability, states that the cues must be accessible to the observer (Letzring & Funder, 2021). That is, behavioral cues can only be detected if they occur in a situation or environment where the observer can observe them (Gosling et al., 2011). Therefore,

the cues must occur in contexts where the observer can observe or experience them to become available for judgment.

The third stage, *detection*, states that observers must detect the relevant and available cues (Letzring & Funder, 2021). That is, when relevant cues are not noticed, they cannot be used to a form a personality judgment. For example, if the manager (target) is setting the expectations and goals for a specific task, the subordinate (judge) must pay attention to what the manager is saying. Therefore, the observer must notice the relevant and available cues in order for them to inform a personality judgment

Finally, the observer must *utilize* these cues to form an impression of the target (Letzring & Funder, 2021). The utilization stage involves several skills that include identifying which cues are relevant to the trait under evaluation, assigning appropriate weight to each cue, and considering situational factors that may shape behavior. For example, for a subordinate to judge manager perfectionism, the subordinate must first identify behaviors that signal perfectionism, evaluate their relative importance, and consider how the context may affect the expression of the perfectionism. Therefore, the observer must appropriately interpret and integrate the available cues in order to form a personality judgment.

Importantly, RAM suggests that these stages are interdependent and multiplicative (Letzring & Funder, 2021). This means that if relevant behaviors are not expressed, if they are not available to the judge, if they are not detected, or if they are not properly interpreted, personality judgments cannot occur. Therefore, a personality judgment can be formed only when all four conditions of this process are met.

In the case of manager perfectionism, this means that subordinates can form such a perception only if managers express behaviors that signal exceptionally high standards and

strong reactions to mistakes, and these behaviors must be visible to subordinates. At the same time, subordinates must detect and interpret these behaviors as reflecting a stable characteristic of the manager. Thus, perceptions of manager perfectionism depend on the presence of relevant and available behavioral cues, and on subordinates' detection and interpretation of these cues.

This leads to the research questions we pose: What is the source of the cues that signal manager perfectionism and that subordinates attend to and interpret? In this paper, we argue that the feedback environment is a source through which managers send relevant and available cues of perfectionism to subordinates, and that subordinates detect and utilize these cues to form their perceptions. In the next section, we elaborate on the feedback environment and explain how it serves as a source of such cues.

Feedback Environment

The feedback environment is defined as the degree to which feedback is available, credible, high-quality, and sensitive (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003). This conceptualization of feedback departs from the traditional performance appraisals that treat feedback as an isolated event and instead conceptualizes feedback as part of the ongoing, everyday context in which performance information is exchanged (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011; Levy et al., 2017). More specifically, Steelman et al. (2004) conceptualize the feedback environment as being comprised of seven distinct facets: source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, favorable feedback, unfavorable feedback, source availability, and promotes feedback seeking. Source credibility refers to whether the manager is seen as knowledgeable about the subordinate's work and capable of evaluating performance accurately and fairly. Feedback quality reflects whether the feedback is specific, consistent, meaningful, and useful for improving performance. Feedback delivery refers to the extent feedback communicated is tactful, considerate, and

supportive. Favorable feedback is the perceived frequency of positive feedback. Unfavorable feedback refers to the extent to which managers point out mistakes when standards are not met. Source availability reflects how accessible the manager is and how easily subordinates can get feedback. Finally, promotes feedback seeking refers to the extent to which the environment encourages subordinates to ask for feedback and feel comfortable doing so.

To date, research on the feedback environment has largely adopted a variable-centered approach in which the feedback environment is represented by a single overall score (Dahling et al., 2017). In these studies, the seven facets are aggregated and averaged to create a composite score, which is then used to predict various outcomes. For example, research shows that the feedback environment is positively associated with feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015; Dahling et al., 2012) and employee well-being (Katz et al., 2021).

However, by aggregating the seven facets and assuming a linear effect, prior research overlooks the possibility that employees experience different combinations of these facets. Indeed, Dahling et al. (2017) showed that employees do not experience these dimensions along a single high-to-low continuum. Instead, using a person-centered approach, they examined patterns in how employees rated the seven facets and identified three distinct feedback environment profiles: a high-quality profile characterized by high levels across all facets, a moderate-quality profile characterized by mid-levels across facets, and an unfavorable profile characterized by generally low levels on most facets, except relatively higher levels of unfavorable feedback.

Importantly, Dahling et al. (2017) showed that these profiles are differentially related to outcomes. For example, subordinates in the high-quality profile reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment and lower emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions than those in the moderate-quality and unfavorable profiles. They also reported

stronger intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment, fewer perceptions of organizational politics, and greater engagement in feedback seeking. In contrast, subordinates in the unfavorable profile reported less favorable attitudes, greater strain, stronger turnover intentions, and more negative perceptions of the work environment than those in the other profiles. Taken together, these findings show that the three feedback environment profiles are associated with distinct patterns of outcomes.

Feedback Environment as a Source of Trait-Relevant Cues

Building on the person-centered framework and the Realistic Accuracy Model, we propose that the unfavorable feedback environment is a source of cues that are relevant to judgments of manager perfectionism. As noted above, RAM posits that personality judgments require that trait-relevant cues be expressed by the target and available to the observer. Below, we consider how the unfavorable feedback environment satisfies these two conditions.

The first stage of the RAM requires that trait-relevant behavior be expressed (Funder, 1995). As noted earlier, an unfavorable feedback environment is characterized by high negative feedback and low levels of feedback quality, supportive delivery, supervisor availability, and encouragement of feedback seeking (Dahling et al., 2017). In such environments, supervisors focus on mistakes and work that does not meet standards, whereas positive performance receives relatively little attention. Feedback in such environments often lacks clear guidance on how to improve and is often delivered untactfully and in a less supportive manner. In addition, managers tend to be less accessible and less open to dialogue. As a result, subordinates experience a feedback environment that emphasizes errors, with little interpersonal support.

Importantly, these behaviors closely resemble the defining features of OOP. Indeed, OOP involves imposing rigid and often unrealistic standards on others, focusing strongly on mistakes

and deviations from expectations, reacting critically when standards are not met, and blaming others for perceived shortcomings (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Otto et al., 2021). In addition, individuals high in OOP tend to show low empathy, reduced interest in supporting or developing others, and difficulty regulating frustration. As a result, they tend to be untactful or harsh in their interpersonal behavior (Stoeber, 2014, 2015; Stoeber et al., 2017). They are also described as self-focused, less forgiving of others' mistakes, and rarely present to support others' needs (Stoeber, 2014). Thus, the pattern of feedback behaviors characteristic of the unfavorable environment closely mirrors the behavioral tendencies associated with OOP. Accordingly, we argue that the unfavorable feedback environment expresses cues that are directly relevant to judgments of manager perfectionism.

The second stage of RAM requires that these cues be available to the observer. Feedback is typically delivered directly from managers to employees. Managers provide feedback through formal performance evaluations, ongoing discussions, weekly meetings, and informal comments during daily work (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011). Therefore, the feedback managers provide is observable to subordinates. Accordingly, the cues conveyed through feedback are available for subordinates to use when forming judgments about their manager's perfectionism.

Taken together, the unfavorable feedback environment satisfies the first two stages of the RAM process — it expresses behaviors that are directly relevant to OOP and makes these cues available to subordinates. However, whether subordinates actually detect and utilize these cues to form perceptions of manager perfectionism depends on characteristics of the subordinate, which we elaborate on below.

Feedback Orientation and Perceptions of Manager Perfectionism

According to the Realistic Accuracy Model, individuals differ in their ability and motivation to accurately judge others' personality traits (Funder, 1995; Letzring & Funder, 2021). This individual difference is captured by what is referred to as good judge characteristics. The good judge concept reflects the idea that some individuals are generally better than others at judging personality. Research suggests that good judges tend to possess cognitive abilities and knowledge that help them process behavioral information, interpersonal skills, empathy, perspective taking, and motivation to understand others accurately (Letzring, 2008). In turn, these characteristics allow observers to attend to and appropriately interpret the behavioral cues that signal underlying personality traits. Accordingly, good judge characteristics influence the latter stages of RAM — detection and utilization.

In the workplace, subordinates differ in the extent to which they detect and utilize the feedback they receive from their managers. One individual difference that captures this tendency is feedback orientation. Lindenbaum and Levy (2010) define feedback orientation as the extent to which individuals are receptive to feedback and view it as valuable for improving performance. They conceptualize feedback orientation as a multidimensional construct consisting of four dimensions: feedback utility, accountability, feedback self-efficacy, and social awareness. Feedback utility reflects the extent to which individuals believe feedback is useful for improving performance and achieving goals. Accountability refers to the degree to which individuals feel responsible for attending to and responding constructively to feedback. Feedback self-efficacy captures individuals' confidence in their ability to interpret and effectively respond to feedback. Finally, social awareness reflects individuals' sensitivity to how others evaluate them and their tendency to attend to social information about their performance. Together, these

dimensions reflect the tendency to value, attend to, and process feedback information received from the manager (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010).

Accordingly, we suggest that feedback orientation affects the third and fourth stages of the RAM process — detection and utilization. The third stage requires that observers detect the relevant and available cues. Studies on feedback-seeking behavior show that subordinates monitor and interpret supervisory feedback to understand how they are performing (Anseel et al., 2015), suggesting that feedback cues are generally attended to. However, subordinates high in feedback orientation are likely to attend more closely to these cues than those low in feedback orientation, making them more likely to notice the patterns of behavior embedded in the feedback environment. The fourth stage requires that observers utilize these cues to form trait judgments. Research shows that feedback shapes subordinates' broader perceptions of their supervisors — for example, Bak (2020) found that receiving feedback leads subordinates to form impressions of their supervisor's character. Subordinates high in feedback orientation, who place greater value on feedback information and feel more confident interpreting it, are therefore more likely to utilize these cues when forming impressions of their manager's perfectionism.

As a result, the relationship between the feedback environment and perceptions of manager other-oriented perfectionism is expected to be stronger among subordinates high in feedback orientation. Specifically, in unfavorable feedback environments, subordinates high in feedback orientation are expected to perceive higher levels of manager other-oriented perfectionism than subordinates low in feedback orientation, whereas these differences are expected to be weaker in moderate and high-quality feedback environments. Accordingly:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Feedback orientation moderates the relationship between feedback environment and perceived manager perfectionism. Specifically, among employees high

in feedback orientation, perceived manager perfectionism will be higher in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments. In contrast, among employees low in feedback orientation, perceived manager perfectionism will not differ across feedback environments.

To this end, we have argued that the feedback environment serves as a source of cues through which subordinates form perceptions of manager perfectionism, and that feedback orientation affects the extent to which subordinates detect and utilize these cues. However, the consequences of perceiving one's manager as perfectionistic remain to be addressed. Drawing on Motivated Action Theory (MAT; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005), we next examine how these perceptions shape the subordinate goals orientation.

Goal Orientation and the Role of Manager Perfectionism: A Motivated Action Theory Perspective

Goal orientation reflects the motivational orientation individuals hold toward achievement tasks (Dweck, 1986). Researchers generally distinguish between three goal orientations (Vandewalle, 1997). A mastery orientation reflects a focus on developing competence, learning new skills, and improving one’s performance relative to prior performance. Individuals high on this orientation tend to seek challenging tasks and persist when faced with obstacles. In contrast, a performance-avoid orientation reflects a motivation to avoid appearing incompetent relative to others, which often leads individuals to avoid challenging tasks or situations in which failure is possible. Finally, a performance-approach orientation reflects a desire to demonstrate competence relative to others. Individuals high on this orientation focus on

outperforming peers and prefer situations in which their abilities can be demonstrated. Together, these orientations reflect distinct motivational priorities individuals may adopt when approaching achievement situations.

To understand how individuals come to prioritize these different goal orientations, we draw on Motivated Action Theory (MAT; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). MAT begins with the assumption that behavior is goal-directed, such that actions are undertaken in the service of desired goals. Further, MAT proposes that these goals are organized within a hierarchical goal system. Within this system, higher-level goals are abstract and specify the broader purposes of action (i.e., why an action is pursued), whereas lower-level goals are more concrete and specify how those higher-level goals will be achieved. Achievement goal orientations are located at an intermediate level of this hierarchy, linking abstract self-goals to more concrete action. Therefore, individuals possess all three goal orientations simultaneously (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005).

However, MAT suggest that although individuals hold multiple achievement goals that compete for attention, behavior tends to be directed by the goal with the highest level of activation (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). This activation is largely influenced by the perceived discrepancy between the current state and the desired goal state, making goals associated with larger discrepancies more likely to guide behavior. Importantly, MAT asserts that situational cues play a role in this process. Indeed, features of the environment can highlight discrepancies relevant to a particular goal and thereby increase the activation of the specific goal (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). For instance, Beck and Schmidt (2013) examined state-level goal orientations and found that time pressure is associated with fluctuations in goal orientation over time.

Further, MAT posits that repeated exposure to the same situational cue can make a goal chronically accessible (Bargh, 1999). In other words, when a particular goal is activated frequently, it becomes increasingly easy to activate in future situations. Over time, individuals will start to prioritize that goal across different situations, making it more likely to guide their behavior. For example, an employee may value completing tasks quickly. However, when a manager repeatedly emphasizes accuracy and highlights errors in the employee's work, these cues draw attention to the discrepancy between the current level of accuracy and the desired standard. As a result, the goal of performing tasks accurately becomes more activated and guides the employee's behavior.

Building on this perspective, we argue that perceiving one's manager as highly perfectionistic provides cues that shape subordinates' achievement goals. As discussed earlier, other-oriented perfectionism involves imposing extremely high standards on others and reacting critically when those standards are not met (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). We argue that these cues signal that avoiding errors and demonstrating competence are particularly important in the work environment. As a result, subordinates are expected to prioritize achievement goals that focus on demonstrating competence and avoiding failure rather than goals centered on learning and skill development.

Research on achievement settings supports the idea that environmental cues can influence which achievement goals individuals prioritize. For example, environments that emphasize evaluation and competition tend to foster performance-focused goals, whereas environments that emphasize learning and development foster mastery-focused goals (Ames, 1992; Elliot & Church, 1997). Similarly, Dragoni (2005) argued that leader behaviors and the climates they create can shape followers' goal orientations by signaling which forms of achievement are

valued. Taken together, this literature suggests that cues in the work environment can influence which achievement goals employees prioritize.

Accordingly, perceiving a manager as highly perfectionistic is expected to discourage mastery goal orientation, as mastery goals often involve experimentation, challenge seeking, and learning through mistakes. In contrast, such perceptions are expected to increase performance-approach goal orientation, as demonstrating competence becomes more salient. Likewise, they are expected to increase performance-avoid goal orientation, as avoiding criticism and appearing incompetent becomes more important. To this end, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a: Perceptions of manager perfectionism will be negatively related to mastery goal orientation.

Hypothesis 2b: Perceptions of manager perfectionism will be positively related to performance-approach goal orientation.

Hypothesis 2c: Perceptions of manager perfectionism will be positively related to performance-avoid goal orientation.

Further, we propose that feedback environment has indirect effects on goal orientation through perceived manager perfectionism that vary as a function of feedback orientation. We argued that, relative to the unfavorable feedback environment, moderate- and high-quality feedback environments are associated with lower perceptions of manager other-oriented perfectionism, and that these relationships are stronger among subordinates high in feedback orientation. We also argued that lower perceptions of manager perfectionism relate to higher mastery goal orientation and lower performance-approach and performance-avoid goal orientations. Accordingly, moderate- and high-quality feedback environments are expected to have a positive indirect effect on mastery goal orientation, and negative indirect effects on

performance-approach and performance-avoid goal orientations, through perceived manager perfectionism. Moreover, these indirect effects should be stronger among individuals high in feedback orientation. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: The positive indirect effect of feedback environment on mastery goal orientation through OOP will be stronger for individuals with stronger (vs. weaker) feedback orientations.

Hypothesis 3b: The negative indirect effect of the feedback environment on performance-approach goal orientation through OOP will be stronger for individuals with higher (vs. lower) feedback orientation.

Hypothesis 3c: The negative indirect effect of feedback environment on performance-avoidance goal orientation through OOP will be stronger for individuals with stronger (vs. weaker) feedback orientations.

Method

Participants

We recruited individuals from Prolific. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old, reside in the United States, be employed full-time (i.e., working 30 hours or more per week), and report to a direct supervisor. In addition, to reduce careless responding, we restricted participation to Prolific users with an approval rate of at least 95%.

We invited 600 participants to complete the first survey. A total of 602 participants completed Wave 1, including two duplicate submissions identified during data cleaning. Of the 602 initial responses, 22 participants were excluded: seven failed attention checks, seven were flagged through AI screening, two were duplicate submissions, and six responses originated from the same IP addresses. The final Wave 1 sample therefore consisted of 580 participants.

A total of 580 participants were invited to complete Wave 2, and 515 completed the survey (retention = 88.8%). One participant was excluded for failing an attention check, resulting in 514 participants eligible for Wave 3. Subsequently, 514 participants were invited to complete Wave 3, and 477 completed the survey (retention = 92.8%). Eight participants were excluded for incomplete survey completion (n = 3) or failed attention checks (n = 5), yielding a final sample of 469 participants who completed all three waves (overall retention = 78.2%). The final sample was 54.8% men, 43.7% women, 1.1% identifying as another gender, and 0.4% preferring not to answer, with a mean age of 26.72 years (SD = 11.44). The sample was predominantly White (79.3%), with the remaining participants identifying as Black (9.7%), Hispanic (6.7%), Asian (1.4%), or another race (2.9%).

Procedure

Data were collected over a one-week period using online surveys administered using Qualtrics. This study used a three-wave survey design, such that demographic information and the independent variable, the mediator, and the dependent variable were measured on separate days. This design was chosen to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff, et al., 2003).

Survey 1 was administered on Monday**.** At the beginning of this survey, participants provided informed consent and were informed that the study consisted of three waves. Participants then completed a task designed to screen out AI bots. Next, participants completed the Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman et al., 2004) and provided demographic information, including age, race, gender, education level, industry, occupation, hours worked per week, years of work experience, work situation, whether they report to a direct manager, and their manager's initials. Survey 2 was administered on Wednesday**.** Participants who completed Survey 1 were invited to participate in Survey 2. During this survey, participants rated their manager's

perfectionism and completed the feedback orientation measure (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). Survey 3 was administered on Friday**.** Participants who completed Surveys 1 and 2 were invited to participate in Survey 3. During this survey, participants completed the Work Domain Goal Orientation Instrument (VandeWalle, 1997). Participants were paid £1 for each survey, for a total of £3.

Measures

Feedback Environment. Feedback environment was measured using the 32-item Feedback Environment Scale (FES; Steelman et al., 2004). Items were adapted so that each referred to the participant's direct manager. The scale contains seven subscales: source credibility (trustworthiness and fairness of feedback; e.g., "[Initials] is fair when evaluating my job performance"; α = .86), feedback quality (usefulness of feedback; e.g., "[Initials] gives me useful feedback about my job performance"; α = .90), feedback delivery (supportiveness and tactfulness in giving feedback; e.g., "[Initials] is supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance"; α = .81), favorable feedback (frequency of positive feedback; e.g., "[Initials] generally lets me know when I do a good job at work"; α = .91), unfavorable feedback (frequency of corrective feedback; e.g., "On those occasions when my job performance falls below what is expected, [Initials] lets me know"; α = .90), source availability (accessibility of the feedback source; e.g., "[Initials] is usually available when I want performance information"; α = .81), and promotes feedback seeking (encouragement to request feedback; e.g., "[Initials] encourages me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance"; α = .80). Participants rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Manager Perfectionism. Manager perfectionism was measured using 5 items (α = .81) adapted from the Other-Oriented Perfectionism scale (Hewitt et al., 2008). Items were modified so that participants reported on their manager rather than on themselves. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Sample items included, "[Initials] believes everything that others do must be of top-notch quality" and "[Initials] cannot stand to see people close to them make mistakes."

Feedback Orientation. Feedback orientation was measured using Linderbaum and Levy's (2010) 20-item scale (α = .93). This scale contains four factors: utility (perceived usefulness of feedback; e.g., "Feedback contributes to my success at work"), accountability (felt obligation to use feedback; e.g., "I hold myself accountable to respond to feedback appropriately"), social awareness (tendency to use feedback for interpersonal purposes; e.g., "Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others"), and feedback self-efficacy (confidence in ability to receive and respond to feedback; e.g., "I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback"). However, we used the overall feedback orientation score in this study because our interest was to capture participants' general orientation toward feedback. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Work Domain Goal Orientation. Work domain goal orientation was measured using 13 items from the Work Domain Goal Orientation Instrument (VandeWalle, 1997). Alphas were .92 for MGO, .89 for AGO, and .91 for PGO. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Sample items include mastery items, "I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills," approach items, "I try to figure out what it takes to prove my ability to others at work," and avoidance items, "I would

avoid taking on a new task if there was a chance that I would appear rather incompetent to others."

Analysis Plan

To examine whether distinct subgroups of employees exist based on their feedback environment perceptions, we conducted latent profile analysis (LPA) in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). Based on Dahling et al. (2017), we anticipated a three-profile solution. We began by estimating a three-profile solution and continued adding profiles to confirm this expectation and assess whether additional profiles improved fit meaningfully. Model fit was assessed using the log likelihood (LL), Akaike information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC), sample-size-adjusted BIC (SSA-BIC), Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR), bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT), and entropy. Lower AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC values indicated better fit, while higher entropy values reflected more accurate profile classification. LMR and BLRT statistics were required to be significant at $p < .05$. We also considered theoretical parsimony and ensured that each extracted profile represented a meaningful proportion of the sample. The retained profiles were treated as a categorical predictor in subsequent regression analyses using dummy coding.

We tested our hypotheses using multiple regression. To test Hypothesis 1, we regressed perceived manager perfectionism on the feedback environment dummy variables, feedback orientation, and the interaction terms between each dummy variable and feedback orientation. We probed significant interactions using simple slopes analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). To test Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, we regressed mastery goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation, and performance-avoidance goal orientation, respectively, on perceived manager

perfectionism, while controlling for feedback environment (D1, D2), feedback orientation, and the interaction terms included in the model.

To test Hypotheses 3a through 3c, we computed indirect effects of feedback environment on goal orientations through perceived manager perfectionism, conditional on feedback orientation. The conditional indirect effect was computed as the product of the regression coefficient linking feedback environment to perceived manager perfectionism and the coefficient linking perceived manager perfectionism to goal orientation. These effects were estimated at low (−1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of feedback orientation. We computed 95% confidence intervals around the indirect effects using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. Indirect effects were considered significant if the confidence interval excluded zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)

Results

Latent profile analysis

We conducted a latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify distinct subgroups of employees based on their perceptions of the feedback environment. The analysis was conducted using all 580 participants who completed the feedback environment measure at wave 1, rather than the 469 who completed all three waves. This was done to maximize the available sample for profile estimation. Based on Dahling et al. (2017), we anticipated a three-profile solution. Consistent with this expectation, the three-profile solution showed high entropy and significant LMR and BLRT statistics ($p < .05$; see Table 1). Although the four-profile solution demonstrated lower AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC values and a significant LMR test, it showed a lower entropy value and yielded two redundant profiles. Therefore, we retained the three-profile solution (see Table 2 and Figure 1), which closely replicated the profiles identified by Dahling et al. (2017). The largest

profile (56.2%) was a high-quality feedback environment (FE), characterized by high levels across all feedback environment dimensions. The next largest profile (33.4%) reflected a moderate-quality FE, characterized by moderate levels across all dimensions. The final profile (10.3%) represented an unfavorable FE and was distinct from the other profiles. This profile was characterized by lower levels across most dimensions and relatively higher levels of unfavorable feedback. As such, we found two profiles that were quantitatively similar (high- and moderate-quality FE) and one profile that was qualitatively different (unfavorable FE).

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 3. The feedback environment dummy variables were not correlated with perceived manager perfectionism, with both moderate quality feedback environment and high-quality feedback environment correlating r = −.01 with manager perfectionism. It is noteworthy that this pattern is not inconsistent with hypothesis 1, which predicted that the effect of the feedback environment on the perceived manager perfectionism would be moderated by feedback orientation. This moderation it tested in the subsequent section.

Perceived manager perfectionism was positively related to mastery goal orientation, $r = .17$, $p < .001$. This pattern was inconsistent with Hypothesis 2a, which predicted a negative relationship between perceived manager perfectionism and mastery goal orientation. Perceived manager perfectionism was also positively related to performance-approach goal orientation, $r = .25$, $p < .001$, and performance-avoidance goal orientation, $r = .13$, $p < .01$. These patterns were consistent with Hypotheses 2b and 2c, which predicted positive relationships between perceived manager perfectionism and both performance-based goal orientations. The direct tests of these hypotheses are reported below.

Hypothesis Testing

Feedback Environment and Perceived Manager Perfectionism

Hypothesis 1 predicted that feedback orientation moderates the relationship between feedback environment and perceived manager perfectionism, such that employees with strong feedback orientations would perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments, whereas employees with weak feedback orientations would perceive similar levels of manager perfectionism across all feedback environments. To test this hypothesis, feedback environment was dummy coded using the unfavorable feedback environment as the reference group. Two variables were created: D1 contrasted the moderate-quality feedback environment with the unfavorable feedback environment (unfavorable = 0, moderate-quality = 1, high-quality = 0), and D2 contrasted the high-quality feedback environment with the unfavorable feedback environment (unfavorable = 0, moderate-quality = 0, high-quality = 1). We then regressed perceived manager perfectionism on D1, D2, mean-centered feedback orientation, and the two interaction terms. The overall model was significant, $F(5, 463) = 10.20$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .10$ (see Table 4), and both interaction terms were significant: moderate-quality FE × feedback orientation ($b = 0.83$, $SE = 0.31$, $p = .008$) and high-quality FE × feedback orientation ($b = 0.87$, $SE = 0.27$, $p = .001$).

We probed these interactions using simple slopes at ±1 SD of feedback orientation (see Figure 2). Notably, the pattern of results was opposite to the direction predicted by Hypothesis 1. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 predicted that subordinates high in feedback orientation would perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in

the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments, whereas subordinates low in feedback orientation would perceive similar levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments. Instead, subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived similar levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments. Neither the unfavorable versus moderate-quality comparison ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.32$, $p = .38$), the unfavorable versus high-quality comparison ($b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.35$, $p = .11$), nor the moderate- versus high-quality comparison ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .15$) was significant. 5). Among subordinates low in feedback orientation, the difference in perceived manager perfectionism between the moderate-quality and unfavorable feedback environments was not significant ($b = -0.36$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .07$. However, perceived manager perfectionism was significantly lower in the high-quality feedback environment relative to the unfavorable feedback environment ($b = -0.68$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .001$). It is also noteworthy that perceived manager perfectionism was significantly lower in the high-quality feedback environment relative to the moderate-quality feedback environment ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .049$). Taken together, these comparisons suggest an overall negative pattern across feedback environments among subordinates low in feedback orientation. Therefore, because differences across feedback environments emerged among subordinates low rather than high in feedback orientation, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Perceived Manager Perfectionism and Goal Orientation

Hypothesis 2a predicted that perceived manager perfectionism would be negatively related to mastery goal orientation. To test this hypothesis, we regressed mastery goal orientation on perceived manager perfectionism, controlling for the feedback environment dummy variables, feedback orientation, and the interaction terms. Perceived manager perfectionism was not

significantly related to mastery goal orientation, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .323$, $sr^2 = .001$ (see Table 5). Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that perceived manager perfectionism would be positively related to performance-approach goal orientation. To test this hypothesis, we regressed performance-approach goal orientation on perceived manager perfectionism, controlling for the feedback environment dummy variables, feedback orientation, and the interaction terms. Perceived manager perfectionism was positively related to performance-approach goal orientation, $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .029$ (see Table 5). Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 2c predicted that perceived manager perfectionism would be positively related to performance-avoidance goal orientation. To test this hypothesis, we regressed performance-avoidance goal orientation on perceived manager perfectionism, controlling for the feedback environment dummy variables, feedback orientation, and the interaction terms. Perceived manager perfectionism was positively related to performance-avoidance goal orientation, $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .022$ (see Table 5). Thus, Hypothesis 2c was supported.

Conditional Indirect Effects

Hypothesis 3a predicted that the indirect effect of feedback environment on mastery goal orientation through perceived manager perfectionism would be positive and stronger for individuals higher in feedback orientation. Feedback environment was represented by two dummy variables. This hypothesis was therefore tested twice. The first test compared the moderate-quality feedback environment to the unfavorable feedback environment, and the second test compared the high-quality feedback environment to the unfavorable feedback

environment. As shown in Table 6, neither indirect effect was significant at low or high feedback orientation, and the index of moderated mediation was not significant for either contrast. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Hypothesis 3b predicted that the indirect effect of feedback environment on performance-approach goal orientation through perceived manager perfectionism would be negative and stronger for individuals higher in feedback orientation. As shown in Table 6, when comparing the moderate quality to the unfavorable feedback environment, neither indirect effect was significant nor the index of moderated mediation was not significant. When comparing the high-quality to the unfavorable feedback environment, the indirect effect was significant only among subordinates low in feedback orientation, and the index of moderated mediation was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was not supported in the predicted direction.

Hypothesis 3c predicted that the indirect effect of feedback environment on performance-avoidance goal orientation through perceived manager perfectionism would be negative and stronger for individuals higher in feedback orientation. As shown in Table 6, the indirect effect was significant only among subordinates low in feedback orientation when comparing the high-quality to the unfavorable feedback environment, and the index of moderated mediation was significant for that contrast only. Thus, Hypothesis 3c was not supported in the predicted direction.

Supplemental Analysis

We proposed that the three feedback environments differ in the extent to which they contain cues of manager perfectionism. Specifically, we argued that the unfavorable feedback environment contains stronger cues of manager perfectionism than the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments. If this is the case, then subordinates who pay close attention to

feedback should be especially likely to perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the other two environments. Because subordinates high in feedback orientation attend closely to feedback, they should perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments. In contrast, subordinates low in feedback orientation pay less attention to feedback and therefore should perceive relatively similar levels of manager perfectionism across the three feedback environments...

However, the results showed the opposite pattern. Specifically, subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived similar levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments. In contrast, subordinates low in feedback orientation did not perceive similar levels of manager perfectionism across the three feedback environments. Instead, subordinates low in feedback orientation perceived higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the high-quality feedback environment. Although the unfavorable and moderate-quality profiles did not differ significantly, the overall direction across the three profiles was negative. Therefore, the pattern we originally expected to support the idea that the unfavorable feedback environment contains clearer cues of manager perfectionism did not emerge.

These findings suggest that our original explanation for why the unfavorable feedback environment is unique may have been incorrect. Originally, we expected the unfavorable feedback environment to be unique because subordinates high in feedback orientation would perceive especially high levels of manager perfectionism within this environment relative to the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments. A different possibility is that the unfavorable feedback environment is unique because the cues of manager perfectionism within this

environment are especially clear. In this environment, managers primarily point out mistakes and emphasize standards, with little supportive or constructive feedback surrounding those behaviors. As a result, the perfectionism-relevant cues are easy to detect and utilize. In contrast, in the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments, managers still point out mistakes and hold subordinates to high standards but do so in a tactful and supportive manner. As a result, the perfectionism-relevant cues are present but surrounded by competing cues which makes them harder to detect and utilize. If this explanation is correct, then subordinates high and low in feedback orientation should perceive relatively similar levels of manager perfectionism within the unfavorable feedback environment but differ from one another within the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments.

To examine this, we re-estimated the regression model three times, each time using a different feedback environment profile as the reference group. In each model, the main effect of feedback orientation captures whether subordinates high and low in feedback orientation differ in their perceptions of manager perfectionism within that specific condition. Consistent with this explanation, feedback orientation did not significantly predict perceived manager perfectionism within the unfavorable feedback environment ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.23$ $p = .801$), indicating that subordinates high and low in feedback orientation perceived similarly high levels of manager perfectionism within this condition. In contrast, feedback orientation significantly predicted perceived manager perfectionism within both the moderate-quality ($b = 0.77$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .001$) and high-quality ($b = 0.82$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$) feedback environments, indicating that subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived higher levels of manager perfectionism than those low in feedback orientation in these conditions. Taken together, these findings suggest that the unfavorable feedback environment is the only condition in which subordinates high and low

in feedback orientation did not significantly differ in their perceptions of manager perfectionism, consistent with the possibility that this environment provides a uniquely clear signal of manager perfectionism.

Discussion

Summary of Results

Subordinates form perceptions of manager perfectionism, and these perceptions have been consistently linked to a range of negative behavioral outcomes (Ocampo et al., 2024). Despite this, we know relatively little about where these perceptions come from, and how they shape the way subordinates prioritize between competing goals at work. To address these gaps, we examined the feedback environment as a potential source of cues through which subordinates come to perceive manager perfectionism. In addition, we investigated how these perceptions influence subordinates' goal orientation.

We predicted that feedback orientation moderates the relationship between feedback environment and perceived manager perfectionism, such that employees high in feedback orientation would perceive higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the moderate- and high-quality feedback environments, whereas employees low in feedback orientation would perceive similar levels of manager perfectionism across all feedback. However, the results showed the opposite pattern. Specifically, subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived similar levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments. In contrast, subordinates low in feedback orientation perceived higher levels of manager perfectionism in the unfavorable feedback environment than in the high-quality feedback environment. Although the unfavorable and moderate-quality profiles did not differ

significantly, the overall direction across the three profiles was negative. Downstream, we predicted that perceived manager perfectionism would be negatively related to mastery goal orientation and positively related to both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientations. This prediction was supported for performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientations, but not for mastery goal orientation.

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to both the perfectionism and feedback environment literatures by identifying the feedback environment as an antecedent of perceived manager perfectionism. More specifically, the findings suggest that feedback environments differ in how clearly they signal manager perfectionism. The unfavorable feedback environment appears to provide the clearest signal. In this environment, managers emphasize mistakes, provide little positive feedback, and deliver feedback that is untactful and unsupportive. These cues are directly relevant to manager perfectionism, which involves high standards, concern over mistakes, and harsh reactions when standards are not met. Therefore, subordinates high and low in feedback orientation perceived similar levels of manager perfectionism within the unfavorable feedback environment.

At the same time, moderate- and high-quality feedback environments also contain cues of manager perfectionism. These environments include high standards, and attention to mistakes. However, these cues are mixed with useful feedback that is supportive and tactful. Therefore, for subordinates high in feedback orientation, who pay close attention to the feedback environment, these supportive cues do not obscure the perfectionism-relevant cues related to standards,

mistakes, and evaluation. Therefore, they perceived similar levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments.

In contrast, subordinates low in feedback orientation, who pay little attention to the feedback environment, are less likely to notice perfectionism-relevant cues when those cues are mixed with supportive feedback. Therefore, they perceived lower levels of manager perfectionism in the high-quality feedback environment than in the unfavorable feedback environment. Although the unfavorable and moderate-quality profiles did not differ significantly, the overall pattern across the three profiles was negative. That is, perceptions of manager perfectionism were generally higher in the less favorable feedback environments and lowest in the high-quality feedback environment.

This research also contributes to the perfectionism literature by moving beyond specific behavioral outcomes and examining how perceptions of manager perfectionism shape subordinates' goal orientation. In doing so, the present findings suggest that perceived manager perfectionism may influence employee behavior by shaping the goals employees prioritize at work. Specifically, the findings suggest that subordinates who perceive their manager as perfectionistic become more concerned with proving that they are capable and avoiding mistakes that could make them look incompetent.

At the same time, perceived manager perfectionism was not related to goals centered on learning and self-improvement. However, we suspect that this null finding reflects the possibility that perceived manager perfectionism activates mastery-relevant cues in opposing directions. On one hand, perceiving a manager as perfectionistic signals that mistakes are costly and that poor performance may be judged harshly. These cues may reduce the activation of mastery goals because mastery involves learning, experimentation, and taking on challenging tasks that require

some tolerance for mistakes. On the other hand, perceiving a manager as perfectionistic also signals that high standards are expected and that improvement is required. These cues may increase the activation of mastery goals because mastery also involves developing competence and improving one's skills. Therefore, these two processes may work in opposite directions, which may explain why perceived manager perfectionism was not related to mastery goal orientation.

Practical Implications

The present findings offer several practical implications. First, this research suggests that organizations may be able to reduce perceptions of manager perfectionism by improving the feedback environment. Subordinates in unfavorable feedback environments perceived higher levels of manager perfectionism than those in high-quality feedback environments. Given that these perceptions have been linked to outcomes such as reduced creativity, deviant behavior, and unethical behavior (Ocampo et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022), organizations may benefit from encouraging managers to provide feedback that is useful, supportive, and tactfully delivered.

Second, the findings suggest that improving the feedback environment may not affect all subordinates in the same way. Subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived similarly high levels of manager perfectionism across all three feedback environments. This suggests that some employees attend more closely to evaluative cues in the feedback environment and may continue to perceive perfectionistic tendencies even when feedback is generally supportive and constructive. As a result, managers may need to pay closer attention to how performance expectations and negative feedback are communicated to employees who are highly attentive to feedback.

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Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. First, our research was based on a sample that is highly generalizable to the population at large. We collected data from employees across various occupations and industries. By sampling a diverse population of employees, our findings are more likely to reflect valid estimates of managers in real workplace settings. Second, the data were collected across three waves, such that the predictor, mediator, and outcome variables were measured at different time points. This temporal separation helps reduce common method bias and establish temporal ordering. Third, we adopted a person-centered approach to the feedback environment, which allows us to capture distinct configurations of feedback rather than treating it as a single continuous construct.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. First, the design does not allow us to establish causal direction. Although we theorize that the feedback environment shapes perceptions of manager perfectionism, it is also possible that subordinates who perceive their manager as perfectionistic interpret the feedback they receive more negatively. Moreover, although we theorize that perception of manager perfectionism would lead to a shift in goal orientation, it is completely possible that an individual goal orientation influences their perception of their manager perfectionism. Second, our theoretical framework implies that the perfecting of manager perfectionism and goal orientations develop over time through repeated exposure to cues. However, our design captures these relationships over a relatively short period, effectively providing a snapshot rather than examining how these processes unfold over time.

Conclusion

Subordinates often form perceptions of manager perfectionism by observing behavioral cues in daily interactions. Although such perceptions have been associated with negative consequences for subordinates and organizations, little is known about what leads subordinates to view their managers as highly perfectionistic. Drawing on the Realistic Accuracy Model, we examine the feedback environment as a key source of cues through which these perceptions are formed. Using a person-centered approach and a multi-wave design, we identified three distinct feedback environment profiles and tested how they relate to perceived manager perfectionism and goal orientation. Our findings show that subordinates in the unfavorable feedback environment perceived higher levels of manager perfectionism than those in the high-quality feedback environments. We expected this pattern to be stronger among subordinates high in feedback orientation than among those low in feedback orientation. However, this pattern emerged only among subordinates low in feedback orientation, whereas subordinates high in feedback orientation perceived similarly high levels of manager perfectionism across all three environments. In addition, perceiving a manager as perfectionistic was associated with higher performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientations, but was not related to mastery goal orientation. Overall, this study shows that the way managers deliver feedback shapes how subordinates interpret their behavior and, in turn, influences the goals employees prioritize at work.

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Table 1

Fit Statistics for Latent Profile Solutions

# of Profiles	*AIC*	*BIC*	*SSA-BIC*	*LMR (p)*	*BLRT (p)*	*Entropy*
3	10,957.95	11,088.84	10,993.60	.0001	.0000	0.911
4	10,614.61	10,780.40	10,659.77	.0010	.0000	0.881
5	10,415.14	10,615.84	10,469.81	.1969	.0000	0.889

Note. N = 580. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; SSA-BIC = sample-size adjusted BIC; LMR = Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test; BLRT = bootstrapped likelihood ratio test.

Table 2

Descriptive Information for the Three Feedback Environment Profiles

Profile	*% of Sample*	*SC*	*FQ*	*FD*	*FF*	*UF*	*SA*	*PFS*
Unfavorable FE	10.3%	3.05	2.45	2.96	2.48	4.49	3.55	3.13
Moderate-Quality FE	33.4%	5.33	4.88	4.98	4.59	4.78	4.53	4.65
High-Quality FE	55.9%	6.36	6.20	6.10	6.07	5.70	6.04	6.22

Note. N = 580. FE = feedback environment; SC = source credibility; FQ = feedback quality; FD = feedback delivery; FF = favorable feedback; UF = unfavorable feedback; SA = source availability; PFS = promotes feedback seeking. Values represent profile means on a 7-point scale.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. D1 (Moderate FE)	—	—	—						
2. D2 (High FE)	—	—	−.81 ***	—					
3. Feedback orientation	4.03	0.55	−.23 ***	.43 ***	—				
4. Manager perfectionism	4.75	1.12	−.01	−.01	.24 ***	—			
5. Mastery GO	5.39	1.21	−.21 ***	.28 ***	.53 ***	.17 ***	—		
6. Performance-approach GO	4.31	1.50	.01	.05	.30 ***	.25 ***	.35 ***	—	
7. Performance-avoidance GO	3.55	1.58	.19 ***	−.21 ***	−.13 **	.13 **	−.33 ***	.29 ***	—

Note. N = 469. FE = feedback environment; GO = goal orientation. D1 = dummy variable for moderate-quality feedback environment; D2 = dummy variable for high-quality feedback environment; unfavorable feedback environment serves as the reference group. Means and standard deviations are not reported for dummy variables. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Conditional Effects of Feedback Environment on Perceived Manager Perfectionism

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
D1 (Moderate vs. Unfavorable FE)	0.101	0.226	0.445	.657
D2 (High vs. Unfavorable FE)	−0.203	0.217	−0.935	.350
Feedback Orientation	−0.059	0.235	−0.251	.802
D1 × Feedback Orientation	0.830	0.311	2.669	.008
D2 × Feedback Orientation	0.874	0.271	3.231	.001

Note. N = 469. FE = feedback environment. D1 = dummy variable for moderate-quality feedback environment; D2 = dummy variable for high-quality feedback environment; unfavorable feedback environment serves as the reference group. Feedback orientation was mean-centered prior to analysis.

Table 5

Regression of Goal Orientations on Perceived Manager Perfectionism

	Mastery			Performance-approach			Performance-avoidance		
Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	5.11	0.29	< .001	3.04	0.40	< .001	2.57	0.43	< .001
D1 (moderate vs. unfavorable FE)	−0.05	0.22	.818	0.38	0.30	.197	0.48	0.32	.140
D2 (high vs. unfavorable FE)	0.13	0.21	.530	0.07	0.29	.810	−0.20	0.31	.510
Feedback orientation	0.78	0.22	.001	0.57	0.31	.063	−0.25	0.33	.461
D1 × Feedback orientation	0.56	0.30	.061	0.60	0.41	.147	0.74	0.45	.099
D2 × Feedback orientation	0.34	0.26	.195	0.07	0.36	.852	−0.43	0.39	.267
Manager perfectionism	0.04	0.04	.323	0.24	0.06	< .001	0.22	0.07	< .001

Note. N = 469. FE = feedback environment. D1 = dummy variable for moderate-quality feedback environment; D2 = dummy variable for high-quality feedback environment; unfavorable feedback environment serves as the reference group. Feedback orientation was mean-centered prior to analysis.

Table 6

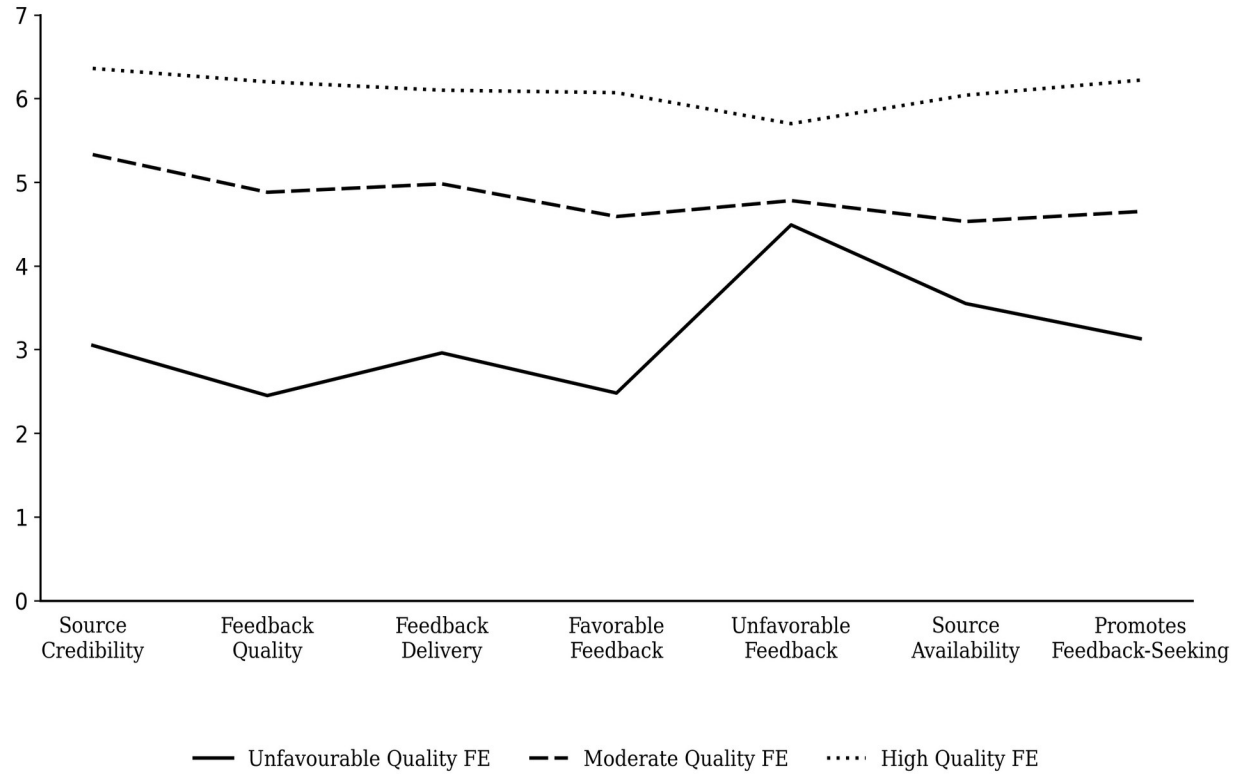
Conditional Indirect Effects and Indices of Moderated Mediation for Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c

	b	SE	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Hypothesis 3a: Mastery goal orientation				
Moderate-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.016	0.026	−0.086	0.021
High feedback orientation	0.025	0.044	−0.045	0.135
Index of moderated mediation	0.037	0.053	−0.046	0.161
High-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.030	0.040	−0.126	0.036
High feedback orientation	0.012	0.038	−0.051	0.102
Index of moderated mediation	0.039	0.054	−0.048	0.165
Hypothesis 3b: Performance-approach goal orientation				
Moderate-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.085	0.069	−0.239	0.037
High feedback orientation	0.133	0.131	−0.102	0.419
Index of moderated mediation	0.198	0.119	−0.021	0.447
High-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.163	0.082	−0.347	−0.029
High feedback orientation	0.067	0.124	−0.174	0.319
Index of moderated mediation	0.209	0.112	0.001	0.444
Hypothesis 3c: Performance-avoidance goal orientation				
Moderate-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.078	0.064	−0.220	0.034
High feedback orientation	0.123	0.120	−0.095	0.375
Index of moderated mediation	0.183	0.109	−0.017	0.417
High-quality vs. unfavorable FE				
Low feedback orientation	−0.151	0.077	−0.326	−0.022
High feedback orientation	0.061	0.114	−0.158	0.290
Index of moderated mediation	0.193	0.104	0.000	0.411

Note.

FE = feedback environment; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Confidence intervals are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

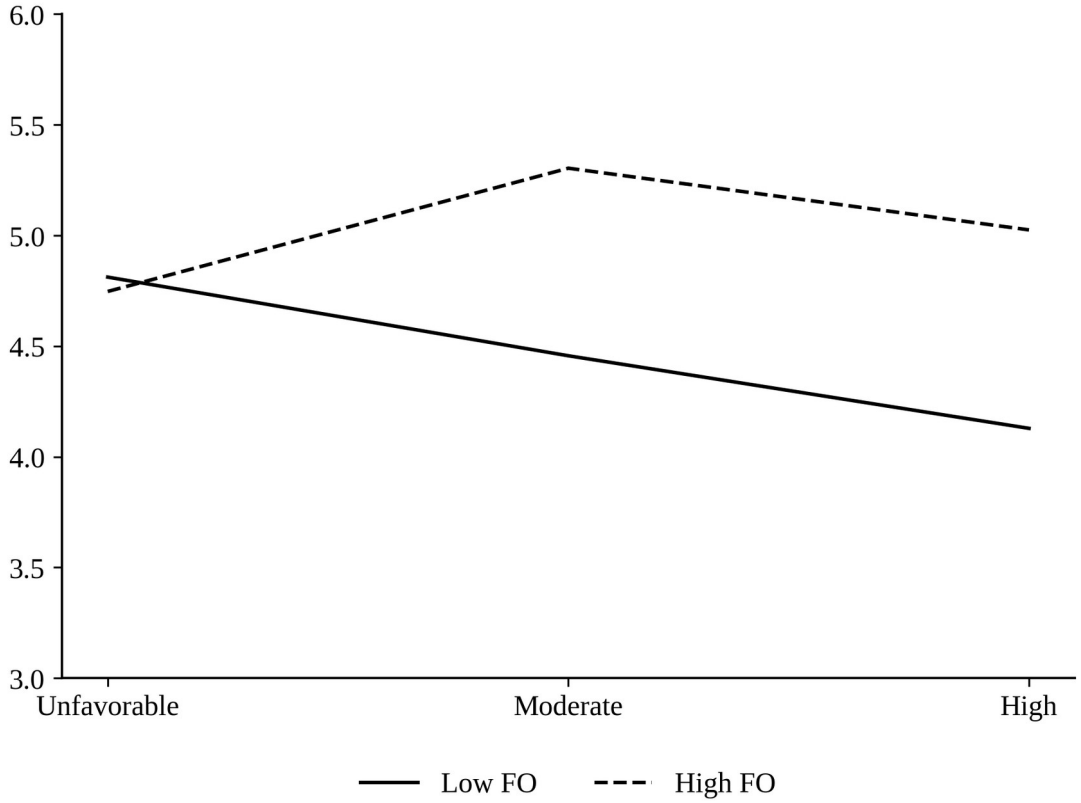
Figure 1
Feedback Environment Typology



Note. *N* = 580. FE = Feedback Environment. Profile means plotted across seven feedback environment dimensions on a 1–7 scale.

Figure 2

Predicted Perceptions of Manager Perfectionism Across Conditions at Low and High Feedback Orientation



Note. N = 469. FO = Feedback Orientation. Predicted values of perceived manager perfectionism plotted across feedback environment conditions.

Appendices

Appendix A

Feedback Environment Scale (Adapted)

Response Scale: 1 [Strongly Disagree], 2 [Disagree], 3 [Somewhat Disagree], 4 [Neither agree nor disagree], 5 [Somewhat Agree], 6 [Agree], 7 [Strongly Agree].

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on your experiences with your direct manager.

Source Credibility

1. [Initials] is generally familiar with my performance on the job.
2. In general, I respect [Initials]'s opinions about my job performance.
3. With respect to job performance feedback, I usually do not trust [Initials]. (R)
4. [Initials] is fair when evaluating my job performance.
5. I have confidence in the feedback [Initials] gives me.

Feedback Quality

6. [Initials] gives me useful feedback about my job performance.
7. The performance feedback I receive from [Initials] is helpful.
8. I value the feedback I receive from [Initials].
9. The feedback I receive from [Initials] helps me do my job.
10. The performance information I receive from [Initials] is generally not very meaningful. (R)

Feedback Delivery

11. [Initials] is supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance.
12. When [Initials] gives me performance feedback, they are considerate of my feelings.
13. [Initials] generally provides feedback in a thoughtless manner. (R)
14. [Initials] does not treat people very well when providing performance feedback. (R)
15. [Initials] is tactful when giving me performance feedback.

Favorable Feedback

16. When I do a good job at work, [Initials] praises my performance.
17. I seldom receive praise from [Initials]. (R)
18. [Initials] generally lets me know when I do a good job at work.
19. I frequently receive positive feedback from [Initials].

Unfavorable Feedback

20. When I don't meet deadlines, [Initials] lets me know.
21. [Initials] tells me when my work performance does not meet organizational standards.
22. On those occasions when my job performance falls below what is expected, [Initials] lets me know.
23. On those occasions when I make a mistake at work, [Initials] tells me.

Source Availability

24. [Initials] is usually available when I want performance information.
25. [Initials] is too busy to give me feedback. (R)
26. I have little contact with [Initials]. (R)
27. I interact with [Initials] on a daily basis.
28. The only time I receive performance feedback from [Initials] is during my performance review. (R)

Promotes Feedback Seeking

29. [Initials] is often annoyed when I directly ask for performance feedback. (R)
30. When I ask for performance feedback, [Initials] generally does not give me the information right away. (R)
31. I feel comfortable asking [Initials] for feedback about my work performance.
32. [Initials] encourages me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance.

Appendix B

Other-Oriented Perfectionism Scale (Adapted)

Response Scale: 1 [Strongly Disagree], 2 [Disagree], 3 [Somewhat Disagree], 4 [Neither agree nor disagree], 5 [Somewhat Agree], 6 [Agree], 7 [Strongly Agree].

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your direct manager, [Initials]:

1. [Initials] believes everything that others do must be of top-notch quality.
2. [Initials] has high expectations for the people who are important to them.
3. [Initials] can't be bothered with people who won't strive to better themselves.
4. If [Initials] asks someone to do something, they expect it to be done flawlessly.
5. [Initials] cannot stand to see people close to them make mistakes.

Appendix C

Feedback Orientation Scale

Response Scale: 5-point scale from 1 [Strongly Disagree] to 5 [Strongly Agree].

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Utility

1. Feedback contributes to my success at work.
2. To develop my skills at work, I rely on feedback.
3. Feedback is critical for improving performance.
4. Feedback from supervisors can help me advance in a company.
5. I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals.

Accountability

1. It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance.
2. I hold myself accountable to respond to feedback appropriately.
3. I don't feel a sense of closure until I respond to feedback.
4. If my supervisor gives me feedback, it is my responsibility to respond to it.
5. I feel obligated to make changes based on feedback.

Social Awareness

1. I try to be aware of what other people think of me.
2. Using feedback, I am more aware of what people think of me.
3. Feedback helps me manage the impression I make on others.
4. Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others.
5. I rely on feedback to help me make a good impression.

Feedback Self-Efficacy

1. I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback.
2. Compared to others, I am more competent at handling feedback.
3. I believe that I have the ability to deal with feedback effectively.
4. I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback.
5. I know that I can handle the feedback that I receive.

Appendix D

Work Domain Goal Orientation Instrument

Response Scale: 1 [Strongly Disagree], 2 [Disagree], 3 [Somewhat Disagree], 4 [Neither agree nor disagree], 5 [Somewhat Agree], 6 [Agree], 7 [Strongly Agree].

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Mastery

1. I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from.
2. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.
3. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills.
4. For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks.
5. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent.

Performance-Approach

6. I'm concerned with showing that I can perform better than my coworkers.
7. I try to figure out what it takes to prove my ability to others at work.
8. I enjoy it when others at work are aware of how well I'm doing.
9. I prefer to work on projects where I can prove my ability to others.

Performance-Avoidance

10. I would avoid taking on a new task if there was a chance that I would appear rather incompetent to others.
11. Avoiding a show of low ability is more important to me than learning a new skill.
12. I'm concerned about taking on a task at work if my performance would reveal that I had low ability.
13. I prefer to avoid situations at work where I might perform poorly.