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Beyond the lone hero: How interpersonal feedback seeking helps entrepreneurs to engage with their social environment

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Abstract

Entrepreneurs are often depicted as lone heroes. However, they are encouraged to seek and use feedback from their social environment to refine their venture ideas and enhance performance. Surprisingly, systematic research on entrepreneurs' feedback-seeking is in its infancy, and this nascent research is marked by conceptual vagueness about the feedback-seeking process and the limitations of related concepts. This article leverages the rich research on feedback seeking from organizational behavior/applied psychology to explicate the nature of entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking while considering the specific demands of entrepreneurship. We delineate feedback seeking from related concepts and theorize a process model of how entrepreneurs seek feedback to pursue instrumental, ego, symbolic, and relational goals, resulting in outcomes not only for entrepreneurs but also for their ventures and immediate and wider social environments. This article provides a foundation for research on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking that is attentive to their personal goals and vulnerabilities while also considering the impact of this process on their social environment. Our conceptual model also offers new

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insights for organizational behavior/applied psychology research on feedback seeking in relation to the future of work.

KEYWORDS

entrepreneurs, feedback, interpersonal feedback seeking, proactivity, process model

INTRODUCTION

Jack Dorsey doesn't know how to grade his performance. It's early May, and Dorsey has just finished his annual reviews of Square's 800 employees. He now needs to complete his own. So the Square CEO sends out a Google Doc to the entire company soliciting feedback, but he makes two suggestions that border on the masochistic: All comments should be anonymous, and all comments should be visible to everyone inside the company. "Write whatever you want," Dorsey tells his troops, adding that he wants to learn "where I've done well, where I've done poorly, and where I've completely screwed things up." (Carr, 2014)

Entrepreneurs create new ventures that they own and manage (Gorgievski & Stephan, 2016) and consequently face unique challenges rarely seen in other lines of work. They navigate high levels of *uncertainty* (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) because it is not clear a priori how customers will respond and how the market environment may change. Their work is *complex* (Lazear, 2005), requiring them to understand and make decisions in diverse areas (e.g., marketing, operations, and finance). Entrepreneurs pursue *multiple goals* (Wach et al., 2016) and possess strong autonomy in designing their work and ventures yet are also responsible and legally liable for any decisions they make. Consequently, they closely *identify* with their ventures, viewing them as extensions of themselves (Mmbaga et al., 2020), and thus, are deeply invested in their work. There are no templates for how to be an entrepreneur, and no supervisor to structure and prioritize tasks. There are, however, *multiple stakeholders*, such as investors, suppliers, customers, employees, and spouses (Delmar & Shane, 2004) with distinct agendas and expectations of the entrepreneur (Fisher et al., 2017) from whom they hope to gain resources and *legitimacy*. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, trusted peers to turn to for guidance (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015).

These challenges mean that entrepreneurs, more so than those in other occupations, need to engage with their external environment through feedback seeking. Feedback—evaluative information about the effectiveness and appropriateness of decisions and behaviors (Ilgen et al., 1979)—is instrumental for entrepreneurs' ventures (Gemmell et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012) because it enables developing product–market fit (Bhave, 1994), effective decision-making (Haynie et al., 2012), sensemaking of opportunities (Kaffka et al., 2021; Pryor et al., 2016), goal achievement (Nambisan & Baron, 2013), error correction and learning (Baum & Bird, 2010; Frese, 2020). Entrepreneurs seek feedback to co-create with stakeholders through effectuation during uncertainty (Saravathy, 2001, 2008) or to involve stakeholders in providing ideas through bricolage when resource-constrained (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

Although all workers seek feedback, the unique characteristics of entrepreneurship in an occupational setting (Cardon & Arwine, 2023) further influence this need. Seeking feedback may serve more *purposes* for entrepreneurs than for other workers, as they have multiple goals (Wach et al., 2016). For instance, entrepreneurs seek feedback about not only their own personal performance, as investigated in traditional occupations (Lam et al., 2007), but also about their ventures (Shepherd et al., 2022), suggesting there are further topics on which to seek feedback. However, because entrepreneurs personally identify with their ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020), seeking feedback may have particularly high ego costs (Grimes, 2018).

Entrepreneurs need feedback from a greater variety of *sources*, that is, from individuals both inside and outside the venture (Domurath et al., 2020), to navigate the complexity of their work and to create legitimacy by meeting the expectations of their diverse stakeholders. They need feedback from individuals with whom they may not have a personal relationship (van Werven et al., 2022), which heightens (perceived) cost to their self- and public image. In contrast, supervisors or peers are the typical feedback sources for individuals in traditional occupations (De Stobbeleir et al., 2020; Lam et al., 2007). Entrepreneurs do not have supervisors and their peers are often competitors who may appropriate ideas (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015), thereby jeopardizing venture survival.

Moreover, entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is *consequential* for them *and* their ventures and stakeholders. Research with traditional occupational groups has prioritized the outcomes of feedback seeking for the seeker (Anseel et al., 2015) and largely neglected its impact on others (for exceptions, see Krasman, 2018; Krasman & Kotlyar, 2019) or the organization. The combination of multiple purposes, sources, and consequences of feedback seeking, rather than looking at each aspect individually, makes the feedback seeking process more complex for entrepreneurs than those in traditional occupational settings. Seeking feedback requires a *within-person process perspective* that explicates how entrepreneurs make ongoing decisions about why, from whom, on what topics, and how to seek or not seek feedback, potentially resulting in new outcomes.

Although entrepreneurship research on feedback seeking is emerging, there is a long tradition of research on feedback seeking in organizational behavior (OB) and applied psychology (AP) focused on employees (for reviews: Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2020). OB/AP research typically examines feedback seeking from a *between-person perspective* to understand who seeks feedback more frequently (De Stobbeleir et al., 2011; Park et al., 2007) from whom (Karakowsky et al., 2020; Levy et al., 2002) and under what conditions (De Stobbeleir et al., 2020; Steelman et al., 2004). This stream of research has explicated feedback as a personal resource (Ashford & Cummings, 1983) that employees seek mainly by asking supervisors (Lam et al., 2007; Whitaker & Levy, 2012) and sometimes peers (De Stobbeleir et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2014) or by monitoring how others act toward them (Anseel et al., 2015). This research stream adopts a proactivity lens (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010) whereby individuals seek feedback to enhance person–environment fit by changing the self (Parker & Collins, 2010) to achieve personal outcomes, such as improved performance or satisfaction (Anseel et al., 2015).

Despite its long tradition of investigating feedback seeking, OB/AP research has not yet fully considered feedback seeking from a *within-person process perspective*. We propose that this approach would be useful to understand how entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of venture creation by engaging with and shaping their social environment through feedback seeking. Although there are two notable attempts at such process perspectives in OB/AP (Anseel et al., 2015; Levy et al., 1995), they do not unpack the ongoing decisions that feedback seekers

need to make, nor do they explain the learning involved through interactions that can shape feedback seeking patterns and tactics.

Overall, entrepreneurs' experiences call for a process perspective on how feedback seeking events unfold that is not available in entrepreneurship research or in OB/AP. We refer to feedback seeking events as the sequence of goals, planning, decisions, inquiries, monitoring, and reflection embedded in each feedback seeking interaction between an entrepreneur and (an) other individual(s). Entrepreneurship research prioritizes the venture outcomes of feedback seeking yet neglects the process, that is, how entrepreneurs seek feedback. Similarly, OB/AP research has examined feedback seeking through a between-person perspective that focuses on understanding the frequency of feedback seeking and assumes stable motives to seek or refrain from seeking it (for an exception, see Sherf & Morrison, 2020). This means that the ongoing, iterative decisions that individuals make in the process of seeking feedback, along with the dynamics of this process, remain poorly understood in both domains.

In this theoretical article, we bridge OB/AP and entrepreneurship research to explicate the nature of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as a dynamic and relational process that unfolds differently across feedback seeking events and is an important way for entrepreneurs to engage with and influence their social environment. Bridging OB/AP and entrepreneurship research on feedback seeking can enrich both streams. Novel insights emerge from considering entrepreneurs' unique work and position in ventures (Baron, 2010) and the cost-value model embedded in OB/AP that recognizes workers' multiple goals when seeking feedback (Anseel et al., 2015; Sherf et al., 2023). Feedback seeking is still emergent in entrepreneurship research; thus, a dynamic and relational process model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking built on the strong foundation from OB/AP can provide a springboard for future research. Conversely, although OB/AP research on feedback seeking is an established stream that has developed a general understanding of occupational feedback seeking, it can be enriched by uncovering novel processes of how feedback seeking unfolds based on a contextualized understanding of decisions and outcomes within the unique scope of entrepreneurship (Cardon & Arwine, 2023).

This article contributes a nuanced explanation of the dynamic and relational nature of feedback seeking as a process distinct from other information and support seeking concepts in entrepreneurship research (see Table 1). Although feedback is prominently understood as easily obtainable through a single act, with positive outcomes for the venture based on its informational value, we frame feedback seeking as an emergent process of navigating costs and benefits across levels of analysis. By explicating how entrepreneurs engage with and impact their social environments through feedback seeking, we challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that entrepreneurs and their ventures are impacted only by feedback from the social environment (e.g., Bhawe, 1994; Muñoz et al., 2018).

To OB/AP research, we suggest a greater appreciation of how workers as active agents navigate the costs of seeking feedback, not only by reducing frequency (Ashford et al., 2016) but also by changing how the process unfolds (Sherf et al., 2023). Such a process perspective could be particularly valuable for other novel and neglected groups of workers, such as gig workers (Petriglieri et al., 2019), intrapreneurs (Gawke et al., 2018), and social activists driving positive change from inside organizations (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016). This perspective sheds new light on understanding feedback seeking as the nature of work changes, and the consequential outcomes for the feedback seeker *and* their social environment in ways that influence person-environment fit (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Next, we define and differentiate feedback and feedback seeking from related constructs. We elaborate upon our dynamic process model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, including

the ongoing decisions they make about why, on what topics, from whom, how, and whether to seek interpersonal feedback from their social environment. We also examine how feedback seeking shapes their experiences, ventures, and social environment.

DEFINING AND DIFFERENTIATING FEEDBACK AND INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK SEEKING

We define feedback in the entrepreneurship context as self- or venture-relevant evaluative information about the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of venture-related decisions and behaviors (adapted from Ilgen et al., 1979). We define entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking as a proactive process to solicit self-relevant or venture-relevant evaluative information about the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of venture-related decisions and behaviors through inquiry from others (building on Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Table 1 outlines how feedback and feedback seeking have been defined and studied in entrepreneurship and OB/AP and compares them to related concepts: information seeking/search, strategic/environmental scanning, coaching, mentoring, and advice.

Our definition of feedback bridges the entrepreneur and venture levels of analysis and foci, as well as different purposes that are prioritized in OB/AP and entrepreneurship research. First, our definition of *feedback* in the entrepreneurship context includes two *levels of analysis*: individual and venture. Building on research in OB/AP (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ilgen et al., 1979), we define feedback as self-relevant evaluative information, that is, information about the entrepreneur and their performance in relation to the complex and multiple roles they enact (e.g., innovator, founder, leader; Cardon et al., 2013). However, entrepreneurs' performance is evaluated based on their venture milestones and accomplishments, thus building on entrepreneurship research (e.g., Domurath et al., 2020; Muñoz et al., 2018), we also include evaluative venture-relevant information in our definition of feedback, which refers to information about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the venture, including business model and operations. Second, our definition of feedback in the entrepreneurship context includes two *foci*: venture-related behaviors and decisions. In line with OB/AP research (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983), we consider feedback as information about how well entrepreneurs meet various goals through their behavior (e.g., developing a business model). However, what differentiates entrepreneurs from employees is their autonomy and responsibility for strategic direction (McMullen et al., 2021; van Gelderen, 2016), meaning their ability to meet goals depends on the decisions they make (e.g., the type of business model they develop). Finally, our definition of feedback in the entrepreneurship context includes two *purposes*: evaluating effectiveness and appropriateness. In line with OB/AP research (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), we include the effectiveness of venture-related decisions and behaviors to establish how well goals are met, if at all, and their appropriateness to establish how well behaviors and decisions fit with the desired entrepreneurial goals.

Entrepreneurs can obtain feedback during the venture creation process from the market, the task, comparisons, and unsolicited and solicited interpersonal interactions. The dominant perspective in entrepreneurship research focuses on feedback from the market in the form of customer demand or through the results of early launches of pilots, prototypes, and business model changes (e.g., Andries et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2017). This is in line with popular practitioner methods, such as lean startup (Ries, 2011) and design thinking (Brown, 2009), that encourage entrepreneurs to release prototypes for market feedback early and often. However,

TABLE 1 Comparison of feedback-related concepts in entrepreneurship research and how they map onto established use in OB/applied psychology.

	Feedback	Interpersonal feedback seeking	Information seeking/search
Nature of construct	Evaluative information as the outcome of (market) performance or social exchanges	Relational process to obtain evaluative information	Process to obtain, interpret, and use information
Definition in entrepreneurship research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not explicitly defined • Studies that define it focus on definitions of specific types of feedback, such as outcome vs cognitive feedback (Haynie et al., 2012) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely explicitly defined • When defined, based on Ashford and Cummings (1983) and Ashford (1986) from OB/AP: proactive interactions of entrepreneurs with other individuals to obtain evaluative information about the effectiveness and appropriateness of their functioning, decisions and behaviors (Collewaert et al., 2016, p. 977; Drencheva et al., 2021, p. 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely explicitly defined • The processes of determining an entrepreneur's information needs, subsequent searching behavior, interpretation, and use of the information (Orrensalo et al., 2022, p. 8)
Definition in OB/applied psychology research	Evaluative information about the correctness, accuracy, or adequacy of past behavior and performance (Ilgen et al., 1979, p. 351)	The conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states (Ashford, 1986, p. 466)	The act of seeking job-related and organizational information to cope with uncertainty and engage in sensemaking (Lim et al., 2020, p. 125)
Illustrative studies in entrepreneurship	Domurath et al., 2020; Eller et al., 2022; Grimes, 2018; Haynie et al., 2012; Muñoz et al., 2018	Collewaert et al., 2016; Drencheva et al., 2021; Katre & Salipante, 2012; van Werven et al., 2022	Cooper et al., 1995; Foss et al., 2013; Westhead et al., 2009
Dominant focus in entrepreneurship	Outcomes of the use (or not) of feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes of feedback seeking • Emerging empirical attention to the process (Drencheva et al., 2021; van Werven et al., 2022) 	Antecedents and outcomes of efforts to obtain and use information

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Feedback	Interpersonal feedback seeking	Information seeking/search
Dominant theoretical lenses in entrepreneurship	Metacognition, identity, information processing, sensemaking	Phenomenon-driven, sensemaking, passion	Resource orchestration/mobilization, information processing, social networks, human capital
Dominant methodological approach in entrepreneurship	Both inductive with qualitative methods and deductive with quantitative methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inductive with qualitative methods • For an exception, see Collewaert et al., 2016 	Deductive with quantitative methods
Salient goals for entrepreneurs examined in research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals • Ego: To manage self-views 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals • Ego: To manage (protect and enhance) self-views • Symbolic: To meet stakeholders' expectations • Relational: To manage relationships with stakeholders 	Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals
Relationship to the social environment	Feedback as input from the environment, which when used, can catalyze fit between the venture and the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment (e.g., markets, investors, customers, experts, employees) as the source of feedback; • Obtained feedback can help entrepreneurs to fit venture into the environment • Engagement in feedback seeking to meet expectations from the environment 	Information as input from the environment, which when used, can catalyze fit between the venture and the environment

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Feedback	Interpersonal feedback seeking	Information seeking/search
Type of information examined in entrepreneurship research	Evaluative retrospective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluative retrospective • Not always provided or relevant for meeting salient goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative, technical, referent • Evaluative retrospective • Prospective
Approach to obtaining information	Solicited and/or unsolicited	Solicited	Solicited and/or searched for
Scope of information examined in entrepreneurship research	Focused on the venture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly focused on the venture • Limited focus on the entrepreneur 	Focused on the venture and the environment
Source of information examined in entrepreneurship research	Customers, investors, mentors/ start-up advisors, peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal to the venture: Co-founders, employees • External to the venture: Customers, investors, mentors/start-up advisors, experts, community members, peers • From personal context: Family members, friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social exchanges with individuals related to the venture: Customers, investors, mentors/start-up advisors, peers, experts • Social exchanges in the personal context: Family members, friends • Consultation with impersonal sources: Reports, trends, statistics

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Strategic/environmental scanning	Coaching	Mentoring	Advice
Nature of construct	Process to obtain and interpret information	Relational process for personal development	Relational process for personal development	Information as the outcome of social exchanges
Definition in entrepreneurship research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely explicitly defined • Aspect of strategic planning to gather information about external (and internal) factors that may impact an organization's ability to execute its strategy and achieve its goals (Garg et al., 2003) 	Support structure provided by a professional based on a close interpersonal relationship and a maieutic approach leading to learning and development (Audet & Couteret, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely explicitly defined • Support relationship between an experienced entrepreneur or professional and a novice entrepreneur to foster the latter's personal development (St-Jean & Audet, 2012, p. 112) 	Information provided by any party outside the firm, drawn from their knowledge or experience, intended to inform firm decisions (Miller et al., 2023, p. 2)
Definition in OB/applied psychology research	Proactively surveying the organization's environment to identify ways to ensure a fit between the organization and its environment by responding to emerging markets, threats, and opportunities (Parker & Collins, 2010, p. 637)	Custom-tailored, learning and development intervention that uses a collaborative, reflective, goal-focused relationship, provided to employees by external or internal coaching practitioners who have no formal supervisory authority over the coachee (Bozer & Jones, 2021, p. 411)	A formal or informal relationship between an older, more experienced professional and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of supporting the protégé's career, and personal and professional growth (Eby & Robertson, 2020, p. 76)	Information to inform individuals' opinions, attitudes, decisions, judgments, solutions, alternatives, and problem formulations (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Strategic/environmental scanning	Coaching	Mentoring	Advice
Illustrative studies in entrepreneurship	Pryor et al., 2019; Schafer, 1991; Stewart et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2012	Audet & Couteret, 2012; Ciuchta et al., 2018; Kotte et al., 2021; Schermuly et al., 2021	Hallen et al., 2020; Kuratko et al., 2021; Ozgen & Baron, 2007; St-Jean & Audet, 2013	Cumming & Johan, 2007; Miller et al., 2023; Vissa & Chacar, 2009
Dominant focus in entrepreneurship	Antecedents and outcomes of efforts to obtain information	Characteristics and contextual factors of (successful) entrepreneurial coaching; outcomes of coaching	Characteristics and outcomes of mentoring	Antecedents of access to advice and outcomes of the use (or not) of advice as an input
Dominant theoretical lenses in entrepreneurship	Selective attention, information processing, entrepreneurial alertness	Phenomenon-driven, personal development	Phenomenon-driven, information processing, personal development	Information processing, social networks
Dominant methodological approach in entrepreneurship	Deductive with quantitative methods	Deductive with quantitative methods	Both inductive with qualitative methods and deductive with quantitative methods	Both inductive with qualitative methods and deductive with quantitative methods
Salient goals for entrepreneurs examined in research	Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals	Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals	Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals	Instrumental: To meet entrepreneurial standards and goals
Relationship to the social environment	Information as input from the environment, which when used, can catalyze fit between the venture and the environment	Enabling the entrepreneur's personal growth to meet demands from the environment	Enabling the entrepreneur's personal growth and access to input to meet demands from the environment and catalyze fit between the venture and the environment	Information as input from the environment, which when used, can catalyze fit between the venture and the environment

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Strategic/environmental scanning	Coaching	Mentoring	Advice
Type of information examined in entrepreneurship research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative, technical, referent • Prospective 	Questions to guide self-reflection, self-discovery, and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative, technical, referent • Evaluative retrospective • Prospective • Questions to guide self-reflection 	Prospective
Approach to obtaining information	Solicited and/or searched for	Solicited questions	Solicited	Solicited and/or unsolicited
Scope of information examined in entrepreneurship research	Focused on the venture and the environment	Focused on the entrepreneur	Focused on the entrepreneur, the venture, and the environment	Focused on the venture
Source of information examined in entrepreneurship research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social exchanges with individuals related to the venture/industry: Customers, investors, mentors/start-up advisors, peers, experts • Consultation with impersonal sources: Reports, trends, statistics, legal and institutional changes 	Professional coaches	Experienced entrepreneurs, start-up advisors, investors, experts/professionals	Investors, mentors/start-up advisors, experts/professionals, peers

entrepreneurs also obtain feedback from the outcomes of the tasks they perform, such as successfully pitching to investors, and from comparisons against peers, such as comparing achievements against peers in an incubator cohort. Finally, entrepreneurs obtain feedback from interpersonal interactions with others. This includes unsolicited feedback provided by others (Seidel et al., 2016; van Werven et al., 2022) and solicited feedback (i.e., interpersonal feedback seeking) (Collewaert et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs may seamlessly transition between these forms of feedback, which may also overlap. For example, task feedback based on the outcome of a pitch can be followed by interpersonal feedback seeking from investors, while presenting an early prototype to a potential customer is a form of market feedback that involves interpersonal interaction.

We focus on proactive interpersonal feedback seeking through inquiry as a meaningful mode through which entrepreneurs engage with and change their social environment. This is consistent with the now dominant approach in OB/AP research (e.g., De Stobbeleir et al., 2020), which recognizes that monitoring to obtain feedback and inquiry for feedback are distinct constructs with different effects on performance (Anseel et al., 2015) and different motivational antecedents (Parker & Collins, 2010). Indeed, entrepreneurs may have limited opportunities for monitoring given the nature of their work, while inquiry is more consistently associated with performance improvement (Anseel et al., 2015; Sherf et al., 2023).

Critically, interpersonal feedback seeking enables entrepreneurs to engage with their social environment in a flexible, controlled, and timely way on topics most relevant to them and from individuals whom they consider to be most appropriate. For example, during a feedback seeking event, an entrepreneur may make multiple decisions in relation to what to seek feedback about (e.g., leadership skills vs. the offering), from whom (e.g., a specific employee vs. another entrepreneur), and how (e.g., during a meeting with a clear feedback purpose vs. anonymously online). As feedback seeking involves interactions with others, it also allows entrepreneurs to obtain cognitive feedback that helps them understand the relationship between their decisions, behaviors, and outcomes within their specific context (Haynie et al., 2012). In contrast, impersonal market or task feedback is likely to result in outcome feedback as performance-oriented information relative to a standard or benchmark without contextual cues. However, cognitive feedback is essential for learning and improving decision-making (Haynie et al., 2012) because it allows entrepreneurs to reframe, redirect, reflect upon, question, and adapt their decisions (Haynie et al., 2012; Kaffka et al., 2021). The interpersonal nature of feedback seeking also allows entrepreneurs to clarify the provided feedback (van Werven et al., 2022), thus increasing its quality, relevance, and precision.

Table 1 compares interpersonal feedback seeking—as a relational process toward evaluative information—with related broader phenomena (i.e., information seeking/search, strategic/environmental scanning, coaching, and mentoring) that are usually considered in OB/AP and entrepreneurship. These processes are related to interpersonal feedback seeking because they involve proactive solicitation for information and support (Parker & Collins, 2010). Indeed, interpersonal feedback seeking can be embedded in these broader processes whereby some of the information that is sought can be evaluative in nature (Morrison, 1993). However, these processes are broader in scope, and some of them, such as coaching and mentoring, do not account for all instances of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. Critically, the relational nature of interpersonal feedback seeking and the evaluative nature of feedback poses unique challenges and goals for entrepreneurs that are rarely salient when they engage in the broader information and support seeking processes. On the one hand, they need to seek feedback from multiple stakeholders (Drencheva et al., 2022) with distinct agendas and differing assumptions about

entrepreneurs, as this determines their legitimacy and ability to build relationships with these stakeholders. On the other hand, unlike other types of information such as advice, often used interchangeably with feedback in entrepreneurship research (e.g., Kaffka et al., 2021), feedback is evaluative information (Lim et al., 2020) about the self, with implications for entrepreneurs' identities (Grimes, 2018). Even when the feedback is venture-relevant (e.g., the effectiveness of the business model), the evidence shows that entrepreneurs still experience this information as an evaluation of the self (Grimes, 2018). This is because new ventures are the product of entrepreneurs' decisions and behaviors, such as designing the venture's business model, and entrepreneurs see their ventures as an extension of who they are as individuals (Mmbaga et al., 2020). Indeed, when ventures fail, entrepreneurs take full responsibility and apologize for the decisions leading to closure (Kibler et al., 2021).

The unique nature of feedback, seeking as a relational process involving evaluative information, as well as of entrepreneurs' work as complex, uncertain, identity-relevant, and in pursuit of legitimacy and multiple goals, introduces novel challenges and aspirations lacking recognition in entrepreneurship and OB/AP research. However, these challenges and conflicting goals can be one potential explanation for the counterintuitive evidence that entrepreneurs may refrain from seeking feedback (e.g., Drencheva et al., 2021; Katre & Salipante, 2012) despite the expected positive outcomes emphasized in the entrepreneurship literature (Corner & Wu, 2012; Gemmill et al., 2012).

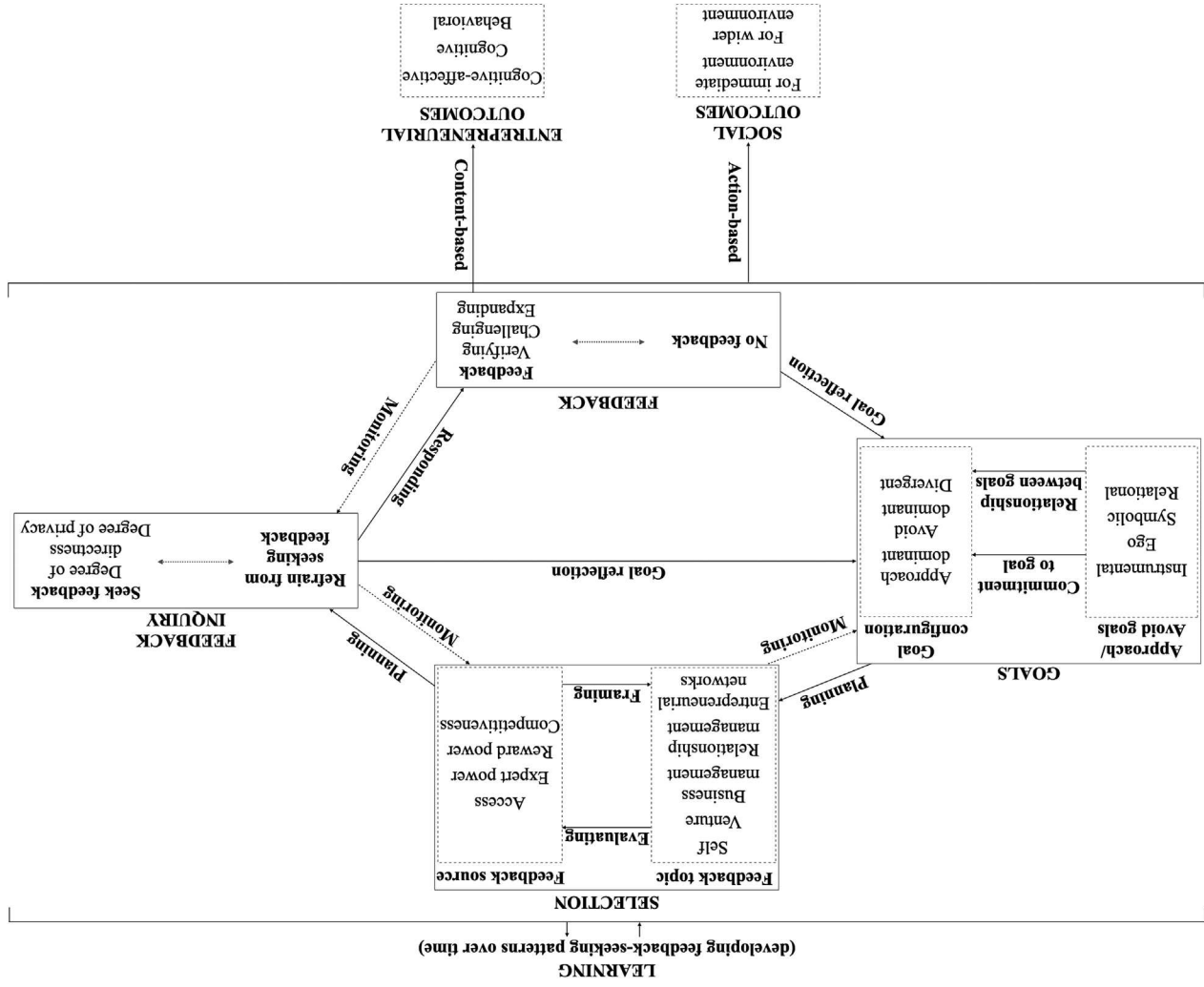
INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK SEEKING AS A DYNAMIC AND RELATIONAL PROCESS

In this section, we theorize a process model to explicate the nature of feedback seeking events and the decisions entrepreneurs make about why, on what topics, from whom, and how or whether to seek feedback (Figure 1). We build on models of proactivity and self-regulation because interpersonal feedback seeking is a proactive process in which entrepreneurs need to regulate the self (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Lord et al., 2010). In turn, we theorize that entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking is driven by their personal and venture goals, requires planning and monitoring of the process leading to a feedback inquiry, and results in multiple outcomes for the entrepreneur, the venture, their immediate and wider social environment, and future feedback seeking events.

Goals that motivate entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is goal-oriented (Sherf et al., 2023). Entrepreneurs may actively recognize and pursue these goals or consider them with lower levels of awareness. Even goals that unconsciously or habitually govern behavior (Bolino et al., 2016) can affect the process of feedback seeking, including entrepreneurs' first decisions about why they seek or refrain from seeking feedback. The goals that motivate (approach goals) or inhibit (avoidance goals) entrepreneurs' feedback seeking fall into four categories: instrumental to achieve entrepreneurial standards and goals, ego to manage entrepreneurs' self-views, symbolic to meet stakeholder expectations, and relational to manage relationships with stakeholders (Figure 1, Goals). Overall, instrumental goals can help entrepreneurs to navigate the uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) and complexity (Lazear, 2005) inherent in their work, whereas symbolic,

FIGURE 1 Process model of Entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback-seeking event.



relational, and ego goals result from entrepreneurs' need to maintain relationships with multiple stakeholders and obtain legitimacy (Delmar & Shane, 2004), often required to navigate complexity and uncertainty, for work that is deeply personal (Mmbaga et al., 2020; O'Neil & Ucbasaran, 2016).

Approach goals

Entrepreneurs arguably seek feedback motivated by multiple instrumental, ego, symbolic, and relational goals that vary in importance. These goals are associated with the behavioral approach system (BAS), which regulates movement toward objects, people, and rewards (Sherf et al., 2023). Instrumentally motivated feedback seeking can help entrepreneurs to *reduce uncertainty* (e.g., Collewaert et al., 2016) as a subjective experience of being unable to predict the probability of future events, such as what options are available or the outcomes associated with each option (Milliken, 1987). Similarly, entrepreneurs may engage in feedback seeking to *learn* because feedback has diagnostic value (Haynie et al., 2012) enabling them to assess past actions, improve future performance, adapt their skills and habits, and identify learning needs. However, entrepreneurs can also engage in feedback seeking to pursue ego and symbolic goals. For example, feedback can verify emerging self-views, e.g., as a capable entrepreneur (Demetry, 2017). Thus, entrepreneurs may be motivated to engage in feedback seeking to *enhance their self-views* in situations in which they expect positive feedback or feedback consistent with their self-views. Additionally, entrepreneurs may be motivated to engage in feedback seeking to *enhance their public image*. They may use the feedback seeking event as an opportunity for self-promotion by subtly including information about their achievements or as a symbolic action (Zott & Huy, 2007) to signal coachability, which is valued by investors (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018). Finally, initial research suggests that entrepreneurs seek feedback to pursue relational goals because feedback inquiries can be a way to safely approach others, expand social networks, and develop trust (Katre & Salipante, 2012; van Werven et al., 2022). By seeking feedback, entrepreneurs can socialize their ideas and decisions and test responses to them, which can allow them to get buy-in and build coalitions to support their work. For example, an entrepreneur may approach an investor or a gatekeeper for a group of customers under the guise of asking for feedback. Hence, entrepreneurs may seek feedback that provides no valuable information but allows them to achieve other valued goals. Although instrumental, ego, and symbolic goals are well established in OB/AP research on feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015; De Stobbeleir et al., 2020; Hays & Williams, 2011), relational goals are uniquely central to entrepreneurs' experiences because the nature of their work involves managing relationships with multiple stakeholders.

Avoidance goals

Entrepreneurs can pursue instrumental, symbolic, ego, and relational goals that are hindered by feedback seeking, and thus, they are motivated to refrain from seeking it. Such goals are associated with the flight-freeze-fight system (FFFS), which promotes defense against or avoidance of undesired outcomes, punishment, or harm to the self (Sherf et al., 2023). Instrumentally, entrepreneurs may be concerned with *idea appropriation* when seeking feedback (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). To receive feedback on venture-relevant topics, entrepreneurs need

to share at least some information about their current ideas, offerings, and business models because they are unlikely to be fully observable by others, particularly those outside of the venture. Disclosing such information can mean losing competitive advantage when others appropriately share ideas and implement or improve them more quickly than the entrepreneur. Symbolically, entrepreneurs may be motivated to refrain from feedback seeking to *protect their public image* because they are often assumed to be competent (Dey et al., 2023), and AP/OB research suggests that feedback seeking can be perceived as a lack of confidence (Ashford, 1986), which is particularly risky in front of employees. Entrepreneurs may be motivated to refrain from feedback seeking to *protect self-views* as an ego goal, since feedback is evaluative information that can challenge entrepreneurs' self-views or threaten their identities (Grimes, 2018). When entrepreneurs seek feedback to learn and reduce uncertainty, the feedback is likely to focus on how they can do better, thus drawing attention to potential weaknesses. Thus, to avoid looking bad to the self and in front of others, entrepreneurs may avoid feedback seeking. Some evidence suggests that symbolic and ego goals may not influence feedback seeking when the seeker anticipates feedback with high informational value (Hays & Williams, 2011; Uy et al., 2023). However, entrepreneurs often do not know whether they will receive valuable feedback, especially when engaging with a new feedback source. Thus, the entrepreneurship context changes how these goals are activated and enhances their importance. Finally, entrepreneurs may pursue relational goals that prompt them to refrain from seeking feedback if they are concerned about how the act of seeking feedback can *damage relationships*. For example, they may be concerned that their feedback requests put pressure on (Krasman, 2018) or annoy stakeholders and, in some circumstances, even expose stigmatized positions when addressing specific social issues (Drencheva et al., 2022). In sum, entrepreneurs' feedback seeking poses risks. Although it is well established in OB/AP research that when pursuing symbolic and ego goals individuals may refrain from feedback seeking (Hays & Williams, 2011), instrumental and relational goals that inhibit feedback seeking have not yet been considered.

Goal configurations

Individuals rarely pursue only one goal at a time (Richetin et al., 2011), and this is arguably the case when entrepreneurs seek feedback because of the complexity inherent in their work, including multiple goals (Wach et al., 2016), multiple roles (Cardon et al., 2013), and multiple stakeholders with distinct legitimacy demands (Fisher et al., 2017). The goals that entrepreneurs pursue when seeking feedback can interact with each other in facilitating or conflicting ways. Two (or more) goals have a facilitative relationship when they can be achieved simultaneously by seeking (or not seeking) feedback. For example, when entrepreneurs are performing poorly in one area of their business, they may decide not to seek feedback about this topic to maintain both their self-view and public image. However, feedback seeking goals can also be conflicting when the achievement of one goal has a negative impact on the achievement of another goal, in which case entrepreneurs experience conflicting motivations to both approach and avoid feedback seeking. For example, learning and image protection goals are conflicting because the need to seek feedback to learn can be perceived by others as a lack of knowledge. Additionally, entrepreneurs prioritize goals based on their commitment to each one. Entrepreneurs weigh the opposing forces to approach or avoid feedback seeking, consciously or not, to decide how important each goal is for the given situation. For example, they may prioritize the learning

goal when seeking feedback from peers, and uncertainty reduction and image protection when seeking feedback from investors.

We theorize three ideal types of *goal configurations* (Figure 1, Goals) that represent different points on a continuum and reflect that, at any given time point, entrepreneurs pursue multiple goals that are of varying importance to them. These goal configurations are not permanent but develop accordingly for each feedback seeking event. Such a configurational approach is useful for investigating the dynamics of specific feedback seeking events to understand how they unfold instead of assuming stable feedback seeking motivations across events. A configurational approach is also in line with an emerging application of reinforcement sensitivity theory to understand when and how individuals engage in feedback seeking in different forms (Sherf et al., 2023).

The *approach dominant configuration* includes a high commitment to a goal or set of goals that promote feedback seeking and low levels of commitment to goals that inhibit feedback seeking. In this configuration, goals promoting feedback seeking, such as learning and uncertainty reduction, are dominant, whereas goals inhibiting feedback seeking, such as protecting self-views and venture competitiveness, are peripheral. Thus, there are low levels of goal conflict, and the dominance of approach goals means that entrepreneurs are motivated to seek feedback.

The *avoid dominant configuration* includes high commitment to a (set of) goal(s) that inhibit feedback seeking and low levels of commitment to goals that promote feedback seeking. In this configuration, inhibiting goals, such as self-view and competitiveness protection, are dominant, whereas goals promoting feedback seeking, such as learning and uncertainty reduction, are peripheral and pose low levels of conflict. Consequently, entrepreneurs are motivated to avoid feedback seeking.

The *divergent configuration* includes a high commitment to conflicting goals that simultaneously promote and inhibit feedback seeking. Given the uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), complexity (Lazear, 2005), multiplicity of goals and stakeholders (Delmar & Shane, 2004; Wach et al., 2016), identity (Mmbaga et al., 2020), and legitimacy challenges (Fisher et al., 2017) salient to entrepreneurs' work, this configuration is most likely in feedback seeking events. Here, entrepreneurs have similar levels of commitment to goals inhibiting feedback seeking, such as protecting self-views and competitiveness, and to goals that promote feedback seeking, such as learning and uncertainty reduction. As this configuration includes high levels of commitment and conflict, it initiates more complex decision-making and planning regarding whether or how to seek feedback to meet these goals (Drencheva et al., 2022). A divergent goal configuration is associated with the behavioral inhibition system (BIS), which promotes approach-avoid conflict resolution through careful assessment, evaluation, and responses that minimize risk (Sherf et al., 2023).

Selection of feedback topic and source

To achieve their feedback seeking goals, entrepreneurs need to make decisions about what (i.e., topic) and from whom (i.e., source) to seek feedback (Figure 1, Selection). Given the uncertain (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) and complex nature (Lazear, 2005) of entrepreneurs' work, they are likely to seek feedback on *five broad topics*: self, venture, business management, entrepreneurial networks, and relationship management (Figure 1, Feedback topic). These topics reflect entrepreneurs' learning needs in creating a venture and encompass the key areas of their

work (Cope, 2005), including uncertainty about the venture and self, complexity related to multiple goals, roles, and stakeholders, and the need to legitimize both themselves as capable entrepreneurs and their venture to build support for it.

Seeking feedback related to the self, such as entrepreneurs' personal performance, work–life balance, and coping with high levels of work demand, is consistent with OB/AP research in which feedback seeking is a personal resource valued in uncertain environments (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Beyond the topics considered in OB/AP research, entrepreneurship research suggests that entrepreneurs also seek feedback about the venture, including its business model and the desirability of the offering (e.g., Andries et al., 2013; Corner & Ho, 2010; Corner & Wu, 2012). The learning perspective on entrepreneurship (Cope, 2005) suggests that entrepreneurs can also seek feedback on other topics related to their multiple demands. Thus, they are likely to seek feedback related to business management as the processes to effectively manage the venture, such as financial planning, marketing, sales, and talent management. Based on the learning perspective on entrepreneurship (Cope, 2005), entrepreneurs are also likely to seek feedback about how to engage with entrepreneurial networks, such as investors, support services, incubators, and accelerators, to build support for their venture. They may also seek feedback on topics related to relationship management, such as building and managing relationships with investors or mentors, or maintaining relationships with significant others and friends who might be under strain (Adisa et al., 2019). In this regard, topics related to entrepreneurial networks and relationship management are directly linked with entrepreneurs' relational feedback seeking goals.

In addition to selecting feedback topics, entrepreneurs need to select *sources*, that is, decide from whom to seek feedback in an environment of multiple stakeholders (Delmar & Shane, 2004) with distinct legitimacy demands (Fisher et al., 2017). Entrepreneurs likely consider four core source characteristics when making this decision: accessibility, expert power, reward power, and competitiveness (Figure 1, Feedback source). First, entrepreneurs likely consider how easily they can approach a potential feedback source based on proximity to their ventures and existing relationships. Entrepreneurship research suggests that entrepreneurs seek feedback from individuals inside their ventures by approaching co-founders and employees, who are easily accessible (e.g., Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015). They may also consider seeking feedback from individuals who are in the proximity of the venture, such as personal advisors, early customers, family members, and friends (Corner & Wu, 2012; Drencheva et al., 2022; Kaffka et al., 2021; van Werven et al., 2022), or who share space with them, such as peers in an incubator or an accelerator (Seidel et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs may also seek feedback from individuals outside of their social networks; however, they are usually less accessible and pose higher effort costs and goal-related risks.

Second, entrepreneurs are likely to consider the *expert power* of potential feedback sources inside and outside the venture. Expert power (French & Raven, 1959) refers to the desired knowledge that a feedback source is anticipated to have that would be beneficial for the entrepreneur. This can be formal knowledge gained through education and training or first-hand experience with specific processes, business models, or customer groups. Expert power shapes the informational value of the anticipated feedback (Anseel et al., 2015) in relation to entrepreneurs' instrumental goals and the topic they have selected for a feedback inquiry. For example, entrepreneurs seek feedback from peers who have first-hand experience with the entrepreneurship process (Collewaert et al., 2016; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015) in addition to experts with unique knowledge (Kaffka et al., 2021; Katre & Salipante, 2012). However, entrepreneurs may also seek feedback from an employee with intimate knowledge of the venture's customers.

Ultimately, the expert power of feedback sources is likely to enhance the informational value of the feedback and thus can enable entrepreneurs to achieve their instrumental goals that stem from the complexity and uncertainty of their work.

Third, entrepreneurs likely consider the *reward power* of potential feedback sources outside the venture. Reward power (French & Raven, 1959) is the perceived capacity or opportunity of feedback sources to influence positive outcomes for the venture, such as investing in the venture, buying its products, or increasing visibility. Reward power is important for entrepreneurs' instrumental goals because, by understanding and meeting the needs and expectations of a feedback source with high reward power, they may gain new customers or investments. Additionally, entrepreneurs likely consider the reward power of feedback sources to achieve symbolic and relational goals regardless of the feedback topic. For example, entrepreneurs likely consider the reward power of feedback sources when seeking feedback to present themselves as coachable and open to feedback (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018) or to signal being invested in specific relationships (Drencheva et al., 2021). This is consistent with research that suggests entrepreneurs seek feedback from investors and customers who can provide financial rewards (Corner & Wu, 2012; Gemmell et al., 2012), as well as from community leaders who can provide access to markets (Katre & Salipante, 2012).

Finally, entrepreneurs likely consider the *competitiveness* of feedback sources outside of the venture when pursuing instrumental feedback seeking goals. They arguably consider the likelihood of the feedback source to appropriate their ideas (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). This consideration is particularly relevant when feedback is sought from peers with similar business models targeting the same markets, or entrepreneurs in the same theme-based incubator or accelerator.

Entrepreneurs' selection of feedback sources and topics is iterative (Figure 1, arrows inside Selection) in line with their goal configurations. There are likely more iterations when entrepreneurs pursue divergent goal configurations with approach-avoid conflict (Sherf et al., 2023) because more decisions need to be made to seek feedback safely in comparison to when entrepreneurs pursue dominant goal configurations. More specifically, entrepreneurs are unlikely to consider the four characteristics of potential feedback sources one by one. Instead, their iterative decision-making in the selection phase acknowledges that source characteristics are interrelated and that they are interconnected with feedback topics and goals (Drencheva et al., 2022). First, potential feedback sources differ in their effectiveness in providing feedback on specific topics. For example, accessible feedback sources, such as co-founders and employees, have the most information to provide feedback about the entrepreneur as an individual. Feedback sources with reward power, such as customers or investors, can provide feedback about the venture in relation to the desirability of its offerings, while those with expert power can provide feedback on business management and entrepreneurial networks. Second, potential feedback sources may also prime new goals than those envisaged at the start of the feedback seeking event. For example, entrepreneurs may be concerned with protecting their image as competent and confident in front of employees, whom they deem to be the most accessible feedback source while pursuing an image enhancement goal with investors by demonstrating openness to feedback (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018). Thus, during the selection phase, entrepreneurs iteratively evaluate the appropriateness of potential sources based on the selected topic and salient goals, while potentially changing the goal configuration and topics selected based on the selected sources. In this regard, the more salient a divergent goal configuration is, the more likely entrepreneurs are to make cautious choices in line with BIS (Sherf et al., 2023).

Finally, during the selection phase, entrepreneurs likely engage in framing (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014), that is, they consider *how* to ask sources for feedback through rhetorical devices and topic crafting to meet multiple goals (Wach et al., 2016) and distinct legitimacy demands (Fisher et al., 2017). They arguably consider how to present the feedback inquiry in ways that highlight certain aspects, downplay others, or selectively disclose information. For example, a feedback inquiry may be presented to employees as an attempt to create a positive work environment where employee voice is valued to minimize potential image risks. In front of peers, entrepreneurs may position a feedback inquiry as an attempt to support the community, thus minimizing competitiveness risks by highlighting community benefits. Although not considered in OB/AP research on feedback seeking, framing of feedback inquiries is likely to be an important way for entrepreneurs to minimize the costs of seeking it, and to achieve avoidance feedback seeking goals without refraining from pursuing it. Indeed, framing is in line with emerging research in OB/AP showing that individuals use different forms of feedback seeking to address approach–avoid goal conflict (Sherf et al., 2023).

Feedback inquiry to request feedback

Following their goal setting and selection of feedback topics and sources, entrepreneurs request feedback. When focusing on the characteristics of feedback inquiries, it is important to note that not seeking feedback is also a possibility at this stage (Figure 1, Feedback Inquiry), particularly when an avoid dominant goal configuration is very strong (e.g., including a high commitment to competitiveness and self-view protection). We suggest that the key aspects of the feedback inquiry relate to *directness and privacy*.

First, entrepreneurs likely engage in feedback inquiries with varying *degrees of directness* (Parker & Collins, 2010; Sherf et al., 2023). On one end of the directness continuum are open feedback requests, for example, an entrepreneur specifically requesting feedback from an investor on the scalability of their venture. On the other end of the directness continuum are indirect feedback inquiries whereby entrepreneurs attempt to conceal their feedback requests. These feedback requests can be seen as covert whereby entrepreneurs test the waters either by approaching the topic generally or directing the conversation toward the desired topic without requesting feedback, for example, an entrepreneur having a conversation with an investor during a networking event and focusing the conversation on a specific type of business model that is relevant to them, without asking for feedback on their own business model. Direct inquiries are likely to be the result of strong approach goal configurations (Sherf et al., 2023). They can provide clear and unambiguous feedback, useful for learning and reducing uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), as well as clearly demonstrating entrepreneurs' desire to meet stakeholders' needs and expectations to obtain legitimacy (Fisher et al., 2017). In contrast, indirect inquiries are likely with divergent goal configurations that represent approach–avoid conflict (Sherf et al., 2023). Indirect inquiries are “safe” tactics as they lower risks related to symbolic, ego, and competitive goals by drawing less attention to the feedback request and sharing less information, thus recognizing the complexity (Lazear, 2005) and identity challenges (Mmbaga et al., 2020) of entrepreneurship.

Second, entrepreneurs' feedback inquiries are likely to vary in the *degree of their privacy* (Levy et al., 1995; Williams et al., 1999). On the one end of the privacy continuum are public and open feedback requests whereby the entrepreneur is identifiable, and the feedback inquiry is observable by others beyond the feedback source. For example, entrepreneurs may request

feedback through blog posts and online discussion boards (Fisher, 2012), which can involve multiple feedback sources simultaneously and observers who do not participate in the interaction, and where the identity of the entrepreneur is shared. Entrepreneurs are likely to seek feedback publicly when motivated by approach dominant goal configurations where the act of seeking feedback and its value is expected to be high. This enables entrepreneurs to obtain more feedback to improve their offerings (Fisher, 2012) or increase the visibility of their symbolic action to meet legitimacy demands (Fisher et al., 2017). On the other end of the privacy continuum are private feedback inquiries that involve only those engaged in the interaction. For example, entrepreneurs may seek feedback from influential customers via one-to-one meetings. Private inquiries are likely motivated by divergent goal configurations to achieve symbolic, ego, and instrumental goals. Importantly, privacy is an easily navigable continuum for entrepreneurs. For example, they can seek feedback in online forums (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015) that involve multiple feedback sources and observers without disclosing their identities. Recent research shows that approximately 5% of posts by entrepreneurs on anonymous forums are requests for feedback (Williamson, Drencheva & Battisti, 2022).

Overall, how entrepreneurs seek feedback by varying directness and privacy can help them to navigate conflicting goals without reducing the frequency of feedback seeking, in accordance with the BIS to promote caution in navigating conflicting goals (Sherf et al., 2023).

The nature of received feedback

Entrepreneurs' feedback inquiries may result in feedback or be dismissed. Although under-examined in OB/AP, dismissing feedback inquiries, either knowingly or not, is likely in the entrepreneurship context (Drencheva et al., 2021). Those approached for feedback may dismiss the request because they do not feel able to contribute; they may lack the confidence to respond due to power dynamics or perceive their knowledge to be irrelevant. Those approached for feedback may also ignore the request because they lack the motivation or time to contribute. For example, when entrepreneurs' frequent feedback inquiries elicit negative affect between spouses (Drencheva et al., 2022).

Recognizing that the absence of feedback is possible, we turn to the content of the feedback provided. We focus on the feedback provided across three main categories: verifying, challenging, and expanding (Figure 1, Feedback), thereby enhancing how the content of feedback can be examined in OB/AP research, which has focused on feedback as positive or negative (Kinicki et al., 2005; Rosen et al., 2006; Steelman et al., 2004). First, entrepreneurs can receive *verifying feedback*. Verifying feedback confirms entrepreneurs' behaviors, decisions, and cognitive schemas as appropriate and effective. It signals that current approaches are working. For example, verifying feedback can confirm product–market fit or individuals' emerging self-views as entrepreneurs (Demetry, 2017). Verifying feedback serves as a positive signal to maintain the status quo and continue current efforts. Second, entrepreneurs can receive *challenging feedback*, which disconfirms or questions the effectiveness or appropriateness of their behaviors, decisions, and cognitive schemas (e.g., Grimes, 2018; Harrison & Rouse, 2015; Kaffka et al., 2021). Challenging feedback signals that current approaches may be ineffective, inappropriate, or insufficient and require change. For example, challenging feedback can raise questions about product–market fit (Grimes, 2018). Such feedback highlights gaps and discrepancies from benchmarks and expectations, thus serving as a corrective function and prescription for change. Finally, entrepreneurs can receive *expanding feedback*. Expanding feedback offers novel

perspectives, viewpoints, and questions that offer alternative methods of exploration going forward (e.g., Harrison & Rouse, 2015; Kaffka et al., 2021). This type of feedback does not necessarily confirm or disconfirm the effectiveness or appropriateness of entrepreneurs' behaviors, decisions, and cognitive schemas but offers additional directions for enhancing their effectiveness. For example, expanding feedback can provide suggestions for product–market fit in new industries that both complement and look beyond the current business model.

The obtained feedback and the accumulation of feedback seeking events shape entrepreneurial and social outcomes.

Outcomes of feedback seeking for entrepreneurs and their social environment

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can shape outcomes for the entrepreneur and their venture as well as their immediate and wider social environment (Figure 1, Entrepreneurial and Social Outcomes). These outcomes depend on two mechanisms: a *content-based mechanism* (Figure 1, Arrow from Feedback to Entrepreneurial Outcomes) and an *action-based mechanism* (Figure 1, Arrow from Feedback-Seeking Event to Social Outcomes). Outcomes underpinned by the content-based mechanism depend on the obtained feedback as a specific type of information that entrepreneurs use for their future decisions and behaviors. Additionally, the act of seeking feedback can be valuable or harmful beyond the information obtained. Outcomes underpinned by the action-based mechanism stem from the mere act of requesting feedback and how this act is perceived by others.

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can lead to two *broad categories of interrelated outcomes*: *entrepreneurial outcomes* related to the entrepreneur and their venture, and *social outcomes* related to their immediate and wider social environment. We now explain these key categories of outcomes. OB/AP research demonstrates the great variety of outcomes possible for the individual in terms of performance, satisfaction, and learning (for reviews, see Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2016). A discussion of all the potential ways in which feedback seeking influences the entrepreneur, their venture, and the environment is not possible in one article. Hence, we will focus on categories of outcomes and explicate, as examples, (1) entrepreneurial outcomes related to the processing and use of feedback aligned with the unique nature of entrepreneurs' work, including uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), complexity (Lazear, 2005), multiplicity of goals and stakeholders (Delmar & Shane, 2004; Wach et al., 2016) with distinct legitimacy demands (Fisher et al., 2017), and strong identification with the venture (Mmbaga et al., 2020) and (2) the social outcomes related to long-term impact on others. We have chosen these outcomes because they have received limited attention to date (Anseel et al., 2015; Gorgievski et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2019) but are fundamental to the influence of feedback seeking on entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial outcomes

The *entrepreneurial outcomes of feedback seeking* may be cognitive–affective, cognitive, and behavioral. These outcomes depend on the content of the provided feedback (i.e., the content-based mechanism) and its manifestation after the feedback seeking event.

Cognitive–affective outcomes

Cognitive–affective outcomes describe the impact upon entrepreneurs' mental and associated affective processes originating from how the entrepreneur processes the obtained feedback in relation to the self. Specifically, feedback seeking may change entrepreneurs' *self-views* as a cognitive schema, helping them understand themselves as unique individuals (Ramarajan, 2014) who are also strongly connected to their ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020). The content of the provided feedback influences one's self-views because it is evaluative information. This is true even when evaluative information is not directly focused on the individual because entrepreneurs' work and their venture often express their self-views (Grimes, 2018). The content of the provided feedback can maintain, enhance, or challenge entrepreneurs' self-views (Chang & Swann, 2012; Hepper & Sedikides, 2012). When entrepreneurs receive feedback that they perceive as consistent with how they see themselves, they are likely to maintain coherent self-views and experience positive affect (Arora et al., 2013; Baron et al., 2012). Such feedback is likely to be verifying in its content. When entrepreneurs receive feedback perceived as an extension of how they currently see themselves, this will likely enhance their self-views (Demetry, 2017) and enable them to experience positive affect (Arora et al., 2013; Baron et al., 2012). Such feedback is likely to be expanding or verifying when individuals begin to see themselves as entrepreneurs (Demetry, 2017). However, challenging feedback that is inconsistent with how entrepreneurs see themselves is likely to damage their self-view (Grimes, 2018) and consequently elicit negative affect (Arora et al., 2013; Williamson, Drencheva & Wolfe, 2022). Entrepreneurs may experience such feedback as a distressing threat to who they are, prompting reflection on how they see themselves with an impact on their wellbeing (Drencheva, 2019).

Cognitive outcomes

Cognitive outcomes that entrepreneurs experience from feedback seeking relate to the processing and use of the provided feedback to navigate the complexity (Lazear, 2005) and multiplicity (Wach et al., 2016) of their work. As reflective and self-regulatory actors (Frese, 2020), entrepreneurs engage in *active reflection and goal setting* upon receiving feedback. Reflection is a form of intensive elaboration that allocates cognitive resources to the processing of the obtained feedback (Daudelin, 1996; Hall, 2002) and crystallizes its meaning. Thus, reflection increases entrepreneurs' awareness of what they have gained from the feedback inquiry. It enables them to be explicit about the information gained and identify learning needs as well as discrepancies in performance that they can address through future learning initiatives or as a means of changing behaviors and decisions. However, upon reflection, entrepreneurs may also dismiss provided feedback, concluding that it does not accurately capture their efforts and ventures (Grimes, 2018).

Depending on the content of the feedback, entrepreneurs can set new or revise existing goals (e.g., Corner & Wu, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2008). Expanding and challenging feedback can offer new and different perspectives and allow entrepreneurs to engage in convergent and divergent thinking (Volery et al., 2015) to set new goals. For example, by obtaining feedback from potential customers, entrepreneurs can identify and develop new product features they never previously envisioned (Corner & Wu, 2012; Fisher, 2012). However, if they approach too many individuals, they may receive an overwhelming amount of diverse feedback, which may have been the case with Jack Dorsey, who received over 500 feedback responses (Carr, 2014). Entrepreneurs can receive conflicting feedback if they approach individuals from different backgrounds. Diverse individuals can bring different perspectives to their feedback but also

represent specific agendas and strategic interests based on their relationship with the venture (e.g., investors vs. employees). Thus, entrepreneurs are likely to set new goals as they reconcile different perspectives and their own vision for the venture (Grimes, 2018). In contrast, verifying feedback confirms behaviors and decisions as effective and appropriate. Thus, when entrepreneurs receive verifying feedback, they are likely to maintain or revise existing goals to preserve their effectiveness or improve them through adaptation (e.g., Corner & Wu, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012).

Behavioral outcomes

Behavioral outcomes are consequences of the feedback seeking event that represent actions undertaken by the entrepreneur to cope with the complexity (Lazear, 2005) and uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) of their work, such as *changes to their behaviors and ventures*, to increase effectiveness and appropriateness across the five categories of feedback content (Figure 1, Feedback topic). Behavioral outcomes depend on receiving feedback and making sense of it (Kaffka et al., 2021), seeking to build on the cognitive outcomes to achieve existing or revised goals. Emerging research shows that entrepreneurs might not take any action to change behaviors and ventures (e.g., Grimes, 2018) or make changes that vary in scale and comprehensiveness of change effort. On the one hand, entrepreneurs can modify their behaviors and ventures to make repairs and adjustments to existing work, models, approaches, and roles (Grimes, 2018). They can achieve this by adding, subtracting, or replacing aspects of what they do or altering their function. For example, they can add a new customer segment to their existing business model (Andries et al., 2013) or delegate recruitment-related tasks to others in the venture. On the other hand, entrepreneurs can re-engineer their behaviors and ventures to represent entirely new approaches, models, and roles (Grimes, 2018). Their re-engineering efforts allow the replacement of key components underpinning their work and business models based on the received feedback. For example, re-engineering efforts can include completely re-imagining their business model and how it creates and captures value (Andries et al., 2013) or changing the role they enact in their venture from innovator to manager (Mathias & Williams, 2018). Indeed, changes in entrepreneurs' behaviors and ventures based on feedback are viewed as inherently beneficial for the venture in entrepreneurship research (e.g., Bhawe, 1994; Haynie et al., 2012; Muñoz et al., 2018).

Social outcomes

As entrepreneurs work with multiple stakeholders inside and outside their ventures (Delmar & Shane, 2004), we propose that their feedback seeking can also have outcomes for others in *the social environment of entrepreneurs*, which so far have been neglected in OB/AP. Feedback seeking can influence entrepreneurs' *immediate work environment*, such as shaping relational dynamics with stakeholders and the culture of their venture. Feedback seeking can also influence *entrepreneurs' wider social environment*, such as shaping norms within the local community of practice. These social outcomes are underpinned by the action-based mechanism because they depend on how the act of requesting feedback is perceived, rather than the feedback itself. These outcomes are unlikely to emerge from a single feedback seeking event; rather, they result from aggregated feedback seeking events that shape relationships and norms.

Outcomes in the immediate environment

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking likely influences their *immediate work environment* by shaping the relational dynamics between entrepreneurs and their stakeholders, including advisory boards, investors, and employees; it is also based on trust, perceptions toward the entrepreneur, and organizational culture. Entrepreneurs can use feedback seeking to grow their networks strategically by reaching out to individuals outside their immediate circles and including feedback sources in advisory boards. Requesting feedback provides a reason to ask for an introduction to, or directly approach, individuals outside of one's network. For example, Katre and Salipante (2012) describe how social entrepreneurs grow and diversify their personal networks by actively seeking feedback from social mission, industry, and business experts, and thus building coalitions to gain support and legitimacy.

Feedback seeking can influence the quality of relationships between entrepreneurs and stakeholders. Recent inductive studies show how feedback sources can become formal advisors to the entrepreneur instead of providing feedback in one-off interactions (Drencheva et al., 2022; van Werven et al., 2022). These findings suggest that feedback seeking helps to develop trust as a quality of relationships that develops over time (Mayer et al., 1995). Feedback seeking reflects an entrepreneur's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another individual based on the expectation that the individual, such as an investor, employee, or peer, will perform a particular action important to the entrepreneur, regardless of their ability to control or monitor the individual (Mayer et al., 1995). Feedback requests show personal vulnerability, such as an entrepreneur revealing that they do not know about marketing even though that might be expected from them. Such vulnerability and willingness to take a personal risk demonstrates initial trust in the feedback source. By providing feedback, the source signals trustworthiness because of their competence and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). This creates a feedback loop and strengthens confidence that future interactions will produce positive outcomes. Thus, feedback seeking can increase trust when feedback sources engage with the request.

However, stakeholders' involvement in advisory roles following feedback requests likely depends on the way in which the entrepreneur seeks feedback. Entrepreneurs' public image represents the perceptions others have of them, such as whether or not they seem caring, ruthless, or lacking focus, and feedback seeking can influence this image based on what the audience deems acceptable and desirable. For example, investors prize entrepreneurs' coachability (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018). Investors also recognize the importance of an entrepreneur's positive public image (Chahine et al., 2011) for legitimacy. Thus, investors are likely to consider feedback seeking as desirable (Fisher et al., 2017) and view entrepreneurs who seek it positively. However, employees, crowdfunding supporters, and customers likely place a higher value on reciprocity, community engagement, and a shared emotional connection. They prize actions demonstrating that community members are valued and that entrepreneurs are active members of the community (Fisher et al., 2017). When these audiences perceive that entrepreneurs seek feedback only for symbolic reasons, they are likely to view them negatively because such actions violate their values and trust. In contrast, such audiences likely view instrumentally motivated feedback seeking in a positive light, which can contribute to trust development.

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can also influence their immediate social work environment by catalyzing *feedback cultures* in their ventures. Feedback cultures are organizational environments in which entrepreneurs, employees, and involved stakeholders feel comfortable and safe to seek, give, receive, and use feedback for individual and venture development (adapted from London & Smither, 2002). Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can be a sign of vulnerability and authenticity (Laguna et al., 2019). It can make feedback seeking and giving not

only socially acceptable but also desirable inside the venture, thus opening channels for employees to provide feedback (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). As individuals learn by observing others (Bandura, 1977), entrepreneurs who frequently seek feedback from employees and other stakeholders act as role models encouraging others to be more proactive in their approach to feedback. This can shape venture norms of feedback seeking, leading to individual employees seeking more feedback (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can also enhance the quality of relationships with employees, as suggested by research on employees and supervisors (Lam et al., 2007). High-quality relationships can enable employees to provide upward feedback (Kudisch et al., 2006) to the entrepreneur (Chen et al., 2007; Chun et al., 2014), from the entrepreneur, and as a means of benefiting from the feedback environment (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). Thus, entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can influence their immediate work context in relation to employees' feedback seeking and giving.

Outcomes in the wider environment

Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can influence their *wider environment* through the emergence and strengthening of feedback cultures. Entrepreneurs develop their ideas, ventures, and practices through local communities of practice (Lefebvre et al., 2015). Such communities are both place-based, bringing together entrepreneurs from the same territory, and practice-based, bringing together individuals who want to improve their work as entrepreneurs through regular interactions (Bacq et al., 2022). These communities have their own norms that reflect the actions of most people in the community and the actions considered to be morally correct (Reno et al., 1993), thus shaping the behavior within the community. Communities of practice are built around a shared desire to learn, which includes sharing information, best practices, novel ways of working (Lefebvre et al., 2015), and potentially seeking and giving feedback.

By frequent engagement in feedback seeking within the local community of practice, entrepreneurs can act as role models (Bandura, 1977) and contribute to the strengthening of norms according to which seeking feedback is the common behavior within the local community of practice. However, in some communities of practice, feedback seeking and giving may not be common. In such communities, entrepreneurs' frequent feedback seeking within the community can lead to the emergence of new norms when a tipping point is reached and enough entrepreneurs engage in feedback seeking to normalize the behavior (De et al., 2018). However, entrepreneurs might fear peers exploiting the feedback process to appropriate their ideas (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). Thus, along with role modeling feedback seeking in the community, entrepreneurs are also likely to establish a shared understanding of the desired moral behaviors related to feedback interactions. For example, they may put effort into creating norms that make appropriating ideas from peers after feedback seeking morally undesirable. Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking within the local community of practice can thus contribute to the development of feedback cultures at the community levels (beyond the venture) as environments in which entrepreneurs feel comfortable and safe to be vulnerable and seek, give, receive, and use feedback for individual learning and venture development (adapted from London & Smither, 2002).

Dynamics of interpersonal feedback seeking

We have discussed feedback seeking as a linear process to provide a detailed explanation of a single feedback seeking event. However, feedback seeking is a dynamic process that changes within a single feedback seeking event and between multiple events.

First, feedback seeking is a *dynamic process within a single event* in which entrepreneurs iteratively plan and monitor the process. Planning refers to gathering information, considering options, and preparing personal actions for the next few seconds, minutes, days, or even months (Frese, 2020) that help entrepreneurs seek feedback. In this regard, planning links how entrepreneurs translate their goals into feedback inquiries with specific sources on specific topics with a given degree of privacy and directness (Figure 1, arrows to Selection and to Feedback Inquiry). Planning connects the continuous decisions entrepreneurs make about why, on what topic, from whom, and how to seek feedback that reflects the complexity (Lazear, 2005) and multiplicity of goals (Wach et al., 2016) and the stakeholders (Delmar & Shane, 2004) who epitomize their work.

Planning can vary in degree from effortful, salient, and elaborate (characterized as “elaborate planning”) to low planning that is spontaneous, serendipitous, and not immediately observable. When entrepreneurs engage in elaborate planning (Frese, 2020), they comprehensively consider their resources, how to search for feedback sources, and how to frame their feedback requests. Elaborate planning is more likely when pursuing divergent goal configurations in line with the BIS (Sherf et al., 2023). For example, when entrepreneurs consider seeking feedback from investors with whom they do not have a relationship, they will attempt to balance image and uncertainty reduction goals. Entrepreneurs can also engage in low planning, which can occur momentarily with little preparation, and decisions are made in an intuitive way. Entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in low planning when pursuing dominant goal configurations and in situations for which they have developed routines as ready-to-use models of how to seek feedback (e.g., a quick chat with an employee). In such cases, the boundaries between planning, selection, and inquiry are blurred as they occur seemingly simultaneously (Frese, 2020).

Notably, a feedback seeking event does not progress in a linear fashion from one phase to another but is iteratively driven by unique goal configurations and monitoring (Figure 1, dotted arrows between Feedback, Feedback Inquiry, Selection, and Goals). Each feedback seeking event starts with a specific goal configuration, which poses unique requirements for the feedback inquiry. An entrepreneur may move back and forth between phases as they monitor the process in relation to the goal(s) (Frese, 2020). For example, they may “test the waters” by asking another entrepreneur for feedback about their e-commerce website with an indirect request during a networking event. Based on this brief interaction, the entrepreneur may revert to planning and selection to consider the exact feedback request and degree of directness. During the feedback inquiry, entrepreneurs also participate in shaping the feedback provided by asking for clarification and explanation as well as providing explanations consistent with their goals (van Werven et al., 2022). They may identify new goals or reconsider seeking feedback from a specific source due to an avoid-goal configuration as new goals become salient during the interaction. Throughout the process, an entrepreneur may identify new goals, vary the degree of detail involved in their planning, change how directly or privately they seek feedback, and even approach new individuals for feedback.

Second, feedback seeking is likely a *dynamic process between events* because goal reflection and learning shape future feedback seeking events. Upon receiving (or not receiving) feedback and upon deciding to refrain from seeking feedback, entrepreneurs consider whether their feedback seeking goals are achieved within the event (Figure 1, arrows from Feedback Inquiry and Feedback to Goals). This can be an immediate influence when the specific goals motivating the entrepreneur to seek feedback are achieved, meaning the entrepreneur is less likely to seek feedback about the same topic to achieve the same goals. However, if the goals are not

achieved, the entrepreneur may initiate another feedback seeking event to achieve these goals with different decisions related to planning, selection, and inquiry.

Additionally, feedback seeking events can have a delayed influence based on learning (Figure 1 top, Learning). Entrepreneurs not only reflect on how well feedback seeking helps them to achieve their goals but also learn about what works (or does not) from previous interactions. As entrepreneurs realize beneficial outcomes in relation to specific goals resulting from certain feedback inquiries and the decisions leading to them, they are likely to develop patterns of how, from whom, and on what topics to seek feedback to achieve goals that vary according to each interaction. They will learn how to request feedback indirectly and to frame their request as a safe tactic when pursuing a divergent goal configuration or seeking feedback publicly when pursuing an approach goal configuration. For example, an entrepreneur may learn that investors and employees make different image judgments about the entrepreneur's feedback seeking and related goals. Consequently, the entrepreneur may hide or demonstrate their motivations based on their audience in the future. As entrepreneurs develop specific feedback seeking patterns, the process becomes a routine activity with ready-to-go models that require less elaborate planning (Frese, 2009) for a given period, until venture development and changes (Baron, 2007) catalyze new challenges and circumstances that disrupt routines.

In summary, the dynamic aspects of the feedback seeking process explain why and how an entrepreneur's feedback seeking events are iterative and vary over time.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this article, we theorize a model that explicates how entrepreneurs seek feedback as a proactive, dynamic, and relational process by building upon and integrating emerging entrepreneurship and established OB/AP research on feedback and feedback seeking.

Implications for entrepreneurship research

This article broadens the perspective on feedback phenomena in entrepreneurship research by expanding the focus from feedback—as a type of information—to feedback seeking as a process. Complementing the focus on feedback as a type of information given to entrepreneurs by the external environment (e.g., Grimes, 2018; Muñoz et al., 2018), we frame feedback seeking as a relational, dynamic process initiated by entrepreneurs to proactively engage with the external environment and meet diverse goals. Consequently, we clarify and differentiate feedback seeking from broader information and support seeking phenomena (Table 1), based on its evaluative and relational aspects. By explicating feedback seeking as a process and theorizing why and how this process (fails to) unfold(s), our model responds to calls to illuminate the microlevel aspects of social interactions that underpin entrepreneurs' work (Berglund et al., 2020; Pryor et al., 2016). Feedback seeking plays a role in key entrepreneurial theories and processes, such as effectual decision-making (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008) to cope with uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) and to progress venture development (Baron, 2007), resource mobilization through bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012), legitimacy development (Fisher et al., 2017), and the learning perspective on entrepreneurship (Cope, 2005). This existing work considers feedback as a type of information useful to entrepreneurs but acknowledges that microlevel social interactions involved in feedback seeking open up new perspectives in three ways.

First, our process theorizing complements entrepreneurship research that focuses on the instrumental value of feedback (requests) to enhance venture performance (Gemmell et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Volery et al., 2015) by drawing attention to areas of neglect, such as the costs of seeking feedback related to relationships, self-views, and image, that are tied to the relational nature of the process. Entrepreneurs become vulnerable as they open themselves to negative judgment from others and risk damaging their self-view, whereas others' perceptions of entrepreneurs (e.g., as (in)competent and (il)legitimate) may also change, highlighting the symbolic implications of feedback seeking. Although self-view and image costs are established in OB/AP research on feedback seeking (e.g., Hays & Williams, 2011) and have helped to inform our theorizing, they have been overlooked in entrepreneurship research (e.g., van Werven et al., 2022). The self-view costs of feedback seeking can weigh especially heavily on entrepreneurs (more so than on employees) because entrepreneurs' identity is closely intertwined with their venture (Mmbaga et al., 2020). For instance, research on entrepreneurs' mental health suggests that they interpret the negative performance of their ventures as a direct challenge to their entrepreneurial identity, which can have severely negative consequences on their wellbeing (Stephan, 2018).

By drawing attention to the costs of feedback seeking, our model can explain counterintuitive findings that explain why some entrepreneurs seek feedback infrequently (Katre & Salipante, 2012) despite the anticipated benefits (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015). By considering the action- and content-based mechanisms that underpin feedback seeking outcomes separately, we offer insights into how feedback seeking can contribute to negative psychological, social, or emotional states resulting from engaging in entrepreneurial action (Shepherd, 2019, p.217). Thus, we give nuance to the dominant perspective that feedback seeking (e.g., Gemmell et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Volery et al., 2015) and feedback (e.g., Bhave, 1994; Haynie et al., 2012) are always desirable and beneficial. This has important implications for theories and perspectives, such as effectuation (Sarvasathy, 2001, 2008), bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012), learning (Cope, 2005), and legitimacy (Fisher et al., 2017) that only consider the desirable and beneficial effects of feedback seeking. Acknowledging its costs helps us to understand for instance, why entrepreneurs may refrain from fully embracing effectuation and bricolage principles when building their ventures, and why they may forego opportunities to learn—seeking feedback may undermine rather than build their legitimacy or damage relationships when the ask is too much.

Second, by theorizing feedback seeking as a proactive process in which entrepreneurs navigate challenges and costs through iterative goal setting, planning, monitoring, selection of topics and sources, framing, and developing inquiries with different characteristics, we shift entrepreneurship research from investigating entrepreneurs as passive recipients of feedback to active co-creators of feedback. Much existing research portrays entrepreneurs as passive recipients of feedback that they need to make sense of (Kaffka et al., 2021) and incorporate into their ventures (Bhave, 1994). This research asks, “Why don't entrepreneurs seek or use feedback?” (e.g., Grimes, 2018) and investigates the negative consequences of ignoring feedback (Haynie et al., 2012). Our model shifts the research attention to asking, “How do entrepreneurs shape the feedback they obtain?” Our proactive perspective on feedback seeking aligns with portrayals of entrepreneurs as self-regulating agents (Frese, 2020; McMullen et al., 2021) and with OB/AP research on feedback seeking (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Our work invites entrepreneurship research to ask new questions, such as when and what feedback is useful for entrepreneurs from their own perspective, and how they obtain such feedback through the dynamic feedback seeking process. Thus, our model changes how we view entrepreneurs in

relation to feedback by portraying them as agentic, self-regulating actors who are mindful of their social environment.

Finally, our theorizing of feedback seeking charts novel ways in which entrepreneurs influence their immediate social environment, including family members, friends, co-founders, employees, and their wider environment, such as their local communities. We extend the dominant perspective in entrepreneurship research that the social environment influences entrepreneurs and their ventures through feedback (Bhave, 1994) by proposing that entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can also influence the social environment through relational dynamics and shaping norms. Our theorizing further exemplifies these social outcomes by focusing on how feedback seeking can shape the development of advisory boards and feedback cultures within ventures and local communities of practice. This is in line with emerging research suggesting that social entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can have an impact on relationship dynamics with family members who may feel overwhelmed and exhausted by feedback requests, and with service users whose stigmatized experiences may be exposed through entrepreneurs' feedback requests (Drencheva et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking also creates platforms for employees to have a voice, thus allowing others to contribute to ideas, decisions, and organizational culture, instead of assuming entrepreneurs and their imprinting as the main sources of venture decisions and design.

By proposing that entrepreneurs can have an impact on their social environments through feedback seeking, we extend the mechanisms through which entrepreneurs can influence the social environment. Thus, feedback seeking is a mechanism for entrepreneurs to influence their social environment alongside known influence mechanisms, such as job creation (e.g., van Praag & Versloot, 2007), changes in institutions (e.g., Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Tracey et al., 2011), and influencing the behavior (Laguna et al., 2021) and wellbeing of employees (Bort et al., 2020) and spouses (Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn et al., 2000).

Implications for OB/AP research on feedback seeking

We enrich the understanding of feedback seeking as a proactive behavior in OB/AP by explicating its dynamic nature, highlighting implications for novel and neglected groups of feedback seekers, and considering the social consequences of this proactive behavior.

First, our theorizing offers implications for how employees may navigate the costs of seeking feedback by highlighting the dynamic nature of feedback seeking, which complements the emphasis on between-person differences and frequency in OB/AP research (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2016). Our model explicates sources and drivers of within-person differences in feedback seeking events and how they vary over time, which complements the focus in OB/AP research on between-person differences and feedback seeking frequency (Ashford, 1986; De Stobbeleir et al., 2011; Park et al., 2007), and extends existing limited attempts to investigate feedback seeking as a process (Anseel et al., 2015; Levy et al., 1995).

Such a dynamic process perspective also foregrounds the agentic nature of workers in their feedback seeking. Although research in OB/AP recognizes that employees actively seek feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), it typically focuses only on how frequently individuals seek feedback (through monitoring or (in)direct inquiry) and from whom (e.g., Morrison & Vancouver, 2000; Parker & Collins, 2010), thus limiting agency to frequency and choice of feedback source. Employees as active agents also need to make ongoing and iterative decisions about *how* to seek feedback; thus, our model suggests new insights on how employees may manage

the anticipated costs of feedback seeking beyond reducing frequency. In this regard, we join an emergent conversation that demonstrates nuance in how individuals engage in distinct forms of feedback seeking when pursuing conflicting motivations (Sherf et al., 2023). We contribute a process perspective to this conversation that highlights numerous “safe” ways in which individuals can seek feedback based on different decisions about the core phases of the process. For example, we outline how individuals carefully select feedback topics, frame requests specific to the selected sources and topics, and with varying degrees of directness and privacy to minimize or avoid potential costs. In this regard, instead of presenting feedback seeking as either implicit or explicit (Sherf et al., 2023), we highlight that individuals can vary the degree of transparency in their approach.

Second, our dynamic process perspective of feedback seeking can be particularly valuable to inform research for novel and neglected groups of workers. We introduce entrepreneurs as a novel group of feedback seekers, usually neglected in OB/AP research on the topic (Ashford et al., 2016), who can offer unique insights on feedback seeking relevant to the future of work. Entrepreneurship epitomizes the work context in which feedback seeking is arguably valuable due to its inherent uncertain, dynamic, and complex nature (Ashford et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs' agency, innovativeness, and personal responsibility in the face of uncertainty are also characteristics often associated with the future of work; therefore, our insights can be valuable in other settings and can inform us about the future of work (Gorgievski & Stephan, 2016). Such insights can be particularly relevant for groups of feedback seekers who have been largely neglected in feedback seeking research, such as strategic leaders: CEOs and top management teams who set the direction and purpose of organizations (for an exception, see Ashford et al., 2018); as well as groups of workers who are becoming more common as work and organizations change, such as gig workers who work across organizational boundaries (Petriglieri et al., 2019), intrapreneurs innovating inside organizations (Gawke et al., 2018), and insider social activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016).

These groups share many similarities with entrepreneurs that can influence how the feedback seeking process unfolds for them. Much like entrepreneurs, these groups of workers can potentially access many feedback sources across organizational boundaries, yet few sources can offer meaningful feedback owing to their complex work and the blurry boundaries between the multiple roles in which they engage (e.g., day job and intrapreneurial project; strategy development for multiple business units). These groups of workers often face heightened uncertainty and complexity that make feedback valuable, yet they likely face image costs and fear appropriation of their ideas when seeking feedback across organizational or unit boundaries. Such image costs can be significant for these groups of workers because their public image reflects upon their organizations and initiatives (Chahine et al., 2011; Sohn et al., 2009). For example, an intrapreneur seeking resources to grow their initiative may struggle to mobilize the necessary resources if they are perceived as lacking knowledge due to feedback requests. Moreover, the symbolic nature of feedback seeking outlined by our model can also be strategically leveraged by these groups of workers to be seen as collaborative and inclusive. For example, the same intrapreneur can seek feedback from peers to engage them in their initiative even if the feedback is not expected to be valuable.

Finally, our theorizing explicates long-term outcomes not just for the feedback seeker but also for others and the environment. Feedback seeking has been viewed as a proactive behavior toward person–environment fit with a focus on changing the person to fit the situation (Parker & Collins, 2010). From this perspective, feedback seeking is a personal resource that enables workers to understand their environment and what is expected of them to meet these

expectations (Ashford, 1986). This approach prioritizes short-term outcomes for the feedback seeker as an initiator of proactive behavior, such as job satisfaction or performance (Anseel et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2019; Parker & Collins, 2010).

Our theorizing nuances this perspective in two ways. On the one hand, we exemplify how feedback seeking as a proactive behavior can contribute to outcomes for *others*, which have so far been largely neglected in feedback seeking research (Ashford et al., 2016). Our theorizing on entrepreneurs' relational goals to refrain from seeking feedback builds on emerging research in OB/AP (Krasman, 2018; Krasman & Kotlyar, 2019) and entrepreneurship (Drencheva et al., 2022) and shows the potentially negative impact of feedback seeking *on sources*, such as negative affect, role overload, and stress. Additionally, when the source occupies a stigmatized position in society, such as a former offender, they may be concerned that being asked for feedback exposes their stigmatized position (Drencheva et al., 2022). Negative experiences for feedback sources are likely when entrepreneurs and leaders, as holders of legitimate, reward, and coercive power (French & Raven, 1959), seek feedback downward from employees who may find the request stressful and demanding significant resources. Thus, although current feedback research emphasizes the needs of the feedback seeker (Parker & Collins, 2010), we highlight the unintentional, yet potentially negative consequences for the sources who are asked to provide feedback. By highlighting the negative consequences of feedback seeking for others instead of the feedback seeker, we complement calls for more attention to the dark side effects of proactivity (see Bolino, Turnley & Anderson, 2016).

On the other hand, we exemplify how feedback seeking can contribute to changes in the environment through relational dynamics within ventures and communities of practice, thus providing a new mechanism for how this proactive behavior contributes to person–environment fit. Entrepreneurs' position at the top of ventures and at the boundary between ventures and the outside world helps us to theorize how their feedback seeking can contribute to the development and strengthening of norms related to feedback at the venture and the local community of practice level through role modeling, reciprocity, and trusting relationships. Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can change the environment in ways specifically related to feedback cultures. However, the instrumental, symbolic, and relational use of feedback seeking can be valuable for other novel and neglected groups to gain support for their initiatives and thus change the environment beyond feedback cultures. When individuals have scope for innovation, autonomy, and responsibility, such as intrapreneurs launching new inclusion projects, they can use feedback seeking instrumentally to provide a platform for others' voices and improve ideas for symbolic and relational purposes to obtain the needed buy-in, build coalitions, and access resources (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Gawke et al., 2018; Geradts & Alt, 2022). Thus, feedback seeking supports person–environment fit by understanding the environment and adapting to it (Parker & Collins, 2010), and it can also serve as a mechanism to change the environment to make it more inclusive when used by specific groups of workers. Future research on such strategic and multipurpose use of feedback seeking inside organizations could enhance our understanding of feedback seeking and support change efforts.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS THROUGH EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

By advancing a novel model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as a dynamic and relational process, we hope to inspire future research in entrepreneurship and OB/AP that considers the unique experiences of entrepreneurs and other neglected and novel groups of feedback seekers.

As a first step, future research can *test aspects of the proposed model* with diverse entrepreneur samples (e.g., nascent, social, high-technology entrepreneurs) because entrepreneurs are a heterogeneous group of workers with distinct needs (Davidsson, 2016). Such research can benefit from experiments, longitudinal, and diary studies to capture (1) the content, framing, and goals behind feedback inquiries; (2) the diverse outcomes of feedback seeking depending on the goals, sources, content, and inquiries for feedback; (3) the social outcomes of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking for their immediate and wider work environment with boundary conditions; and (4) how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking changes over time and along the venture development process (Baron, 2007). Testing the proposed social outcomes of how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can influence their social environments deserves particular attention as this is a neglected topic, with the current focus only on the impact on entrepreneurs and their opportunity development (Grimes, 2018; Kaffka et al., 2021).

Additional valuable insights could be gained by *comparing how different neglected and novel groups of workers frame feedback requests* to maximize benefits and minimize costs. We argue that framing of feedback inquiries is essential, yet this is a topic that has received limited attention. There are initial insights showing that feedback seekers use specific moves, such as back-grounding, forecasting, and opening when responding to feedback in purposefully designed feedback environments (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Future research can build on these insights to investigate how entrepreneurs, strategic leaders, gig workers, intrapreneurs, and insider activists frame feedback requests in settings where they may be particularly concerned with image and idea appropriation costs. For example, how do intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs frame feedback requests when approaching potential feedback sources in their ventures (e.g., resource holders) in ways that minimize the risk of being seen as lacking knowledge?

A fruitful avenue for future research on feedback seeking is the further *development and testing of the boundary conditions* influencing the process amongst neglected and novel groups of workers, with a particular focus on venture and contextual boundary conditions, thus addressing calls for greater attention to the role of context in both entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011) and OB/AP (Johns, 2017) research. Venture and contextual differences, such as those considered next, can influence the feedback seeking process and account for differences between groups of workers.

Neglected and novel groups of workers seek feedback related to their work within and across ventures, thus the nature of the venture should be investigated as a boundary condition. OB/AP research has investigated specific venture factors across organizational types, such as degree of standardization (Krasman,) and bonus systems (Barner-Rasmussen, 2003). However, by their nature some ventures arguably present more challenging situations for neglected and novel groups of workers than other ventures, increasing the saliency of learning and uncertainty reduction goals. For example, social ventures introduce additional levels of complexity and uncertainty for entrepreneur or strategic leaders (Battilana & Lee, 2014), which is also the case for social intrapreneurs and insider activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Geradts & Alt, 2022). The ventures that neglected and novel groups of workers create and work in and across can potentially influence the seeking-feedback process because of resource availability. For example, ventures where feedback seeking is valuable for learning, uncertainty reduction, and experiencing work as meaningful, such as social ventures (Drencheva et al., 2023), also pose resource constraints (Drencheva & Au, 2023), making feedback seeking one of many tactics to deal with complexity and uncertainty. Some ventures also require more feedback sources than others, thus demanding more resources. For instance, social entrepreneurs seek feedback from diverse experts (Katre & Salipante, 2012), which requires more time than engaging with only

one group. This is also likely the case for social intrapreneurs and insider activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Geradts & Alt, 2022). An interesting novel group of workers with whom to investigate venture type as a boundary condition is gig workers who work across multiple ventures, for example, across social and high-technology ventures and thus encounter different demands and resources. Overall, investigating the types of ventures that neglected and novel groups of workers start, lead, and work in and across can provide novel insights into feedback seeking that is more reflective of the changing and complex nature of work than currently available in OB/AP research (Ashford et al., 2016).

Finally, social norms as implicit and socially constructed constraints can also be considered a boundary condition for why and how feedback seeking takes place, or does not, explicate differences between groups. OB/AP research has explored how nationality/ethnicity can influence feedback seeking suggesting cross-cultural differences (e.g., MacDonald et al., 2013; Morrison et al., 2004). However, existing studies neglect the potentially powerful role of norms that describe and guide typical behaviors in social groups, thus potentially having an impact on why and how feedback is sought. For example, when feedback seeking violates norms, neglected and novel groups of workers may be motivated to refrain from it to maintain their public image in performance-based cultures concerned with individual accomplishments. Because feedback seeking fits less with common behaviors in performance-based cultures, individuals are also likely to seek feedback more indirectly and privately to reduce risks. However, feedback seeking is less likely to be perceived negatively in contexts where helpful behaviors are typical, such as socially supportive cultures where individuals may be less concerned with their public image when seeking feedback. In socially supportive cultures individuals are also likely to seek feedback in more direct and public ways because such contexts provide a psychologically safe environment (Stephan & Uhlaner, 2010).

CONCLUSION

We advance the current understanding of feedback and feedback seeking in entrepreneurship and OB/AP research by explicating the dynamic, relational, and costly nature of entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking as one of the important, yet currently overlooked, modes through which entrepreneurs engage with, and influence their social environment. We hope our theorizing can inspire future research on feedback seeking among entrepreneurs and other neglected and novel groups of workers, such as strategic leaders, gig workers, intrapreneurs, and insider activists, helping to understand how individuals navigate the changing nature of work.

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Andreana Drencheva declares that she has no conflict of interest. Ute Stephan declares that she has no conflict of interest. Malcolm Patterson declares that he has no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No data are available for this conceptual article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Compliance with ethical standards. This manuscript does not report on research involving human participants.

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