Individual Differences and Social-Comparative Feedback

Kabir N. Daljeet, The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor: Goffin, Richard D., The University of Western Ontario
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Abstract

The purpose of the overall program of research was to investigate whether there are individual differences that facilitate the acceptance of, or preferences for, social-comparative performance feedback. In doing so, we aimed to establish how individual differences could be leveraged to mitigate the negative reactions that some individuals experience in response to social-comparative feedback (Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016; Roch et al., 2007). Likewise, we sought to determine whether individual differences were associated with a preference for social-comparative feedback. The results of the first study (N = 255) advanced a novel experimental design and found that, with limited exception, the individual differences examined in the study were not related to ratees’ reactions to and acceptance of social-comparative performance feedback. In our second study (N = 145) participants were presented with a vignette and indicated whether they would prefer to work for a company that used a social-comparative performance management system or a traditional absolute performance management system. The results of the study found that individuals who were high on two narrow facets of Conscientiousness (i.e., Diligence, and Organization) preferred social-comparative performance ratings over traditional absolute performance ratings. The details and implications of these findings across both studies are discussed and we conclude that more research on this topic is needed.

Keywords: Feedback, Reactions to Feedback, Performance Feedback, Social-Comparative Feedback, Personality, Individual Differences
Lay Summary

The purpose of this program of research was to study how aspects of human personality and individual differences might relate to people’s acceptance of, or preferences for, different types of feedback in the workplace, most notably, comparative feedback. Unlike traditional workplace feedback which typically involves evaluating employees against pre-determined standards, comparative feedback involves evaluating employees by comparing their performance to that of others. Comparative workplace feedback has, among other benefits, been found to be more accurate and less susceptible to score inflation than traditional workplace feedback. However, previous research has found that people do not always respond well to comparative feedback. This poses a problem for researchers and practitioners, as even the most advanced workplace feedback systems will fail if employees reject the feedback they are given.

In our first study we used an experimental design to evaluate how emotions may influence responses to comparative or traditional feedback, and how controlling these emotional responses might change how people react to the feedback. Limited evidence was found to support our predictions. In our second study we sought to identify whether people, if given the choice, would have a preference between traditional and comparative feedback and how personality and individual differences relate to these preferences. Participants were told to imagine they had been presented with two job offers and to indicate whether they would prefer to work for a company that used a comparative performance rating system or a company that used a traditional performance rating system. We found that people who made frequent use of interpersonal comparisons and those who could be described as highly organized, hard working, and achievement oriented were more likely to indicate a preference for the comparative rating option.
Overall, in our first study we found limited evidence that the individual differences we examined relate to reactions to comparative feedback. Our second study found that certain segments of the population may be more interested than others in receiving comparative performance feedback. This may allow for improvements in the way and frequency with which comparative feedback and performance ratings can be implemented and leveraged in organizational contexts.
Co-Authorship Statement

Richard Goffin, PhD
Advisor and professor in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Second author of the manuscripts in Chapters 2 and 4.

Benjamin Moon
Graduate student in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Third author of the manuscript in Chapter 2 and 4.
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Chapter 1

Introduction and General Overview

In recent years, there has been no shortage of companies calling for the end of traditional performance management practices (Adler et al., 2016). One need not conduct more than a casual internet search to see that companies such as Microsoft, General Electric, and Deloitte, among others, have moved away from traditional performance management practices, and in some cases, they have even stopped evaluating the performance of their employees all together (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016). Employees and employers alike have often expressed their disinterest in having to either conduct, or be subjected to, performance evaluations (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2011). However, performance ratings are an essential, evidence-based practice that organizations can use to identify and reward performers (Cleveland, Murphy, & Williams, 1989). Despite their flaws, researchers adamantly maintain that doing away with performance ratings would be in grave error and that researchers should focus their efforts on improving them in any way possible (Adler et al., 2016).

Fortunately, there has been renewed interest in improving the technical aspects of performance ratings as well as the way they are conducted (Gorman, Meriac, Roch, Ray, & Gamble, 2017). One such advancement involves leveraging social comparison theory to improve the accuracy and meaningfulness of performance ratings (Goffin & Olson, 2011). Social comparison theory holds that humans are regularly making interpersonal comparisons in order to approximate how their own attributes, attitudes, and skills measure up to those of relevant others (Festinger, 1952). Researchers have argued that social comparison theory can be applied to the process of evaluating performance in the workplace as the notion of comparing persons to persons or persons to groups forms the basis of social-comparative performance ratings (Goffin,
Traditionally, performance ratings involve evaluating workplace behaviour against an absolute standard (Wagner, Goffin, 1997). That is, evaluating workplace behaviour along a continuum to identify the extent to which an employee’s performance meets a set of pre-determined standards and criteria. In contrast, social-comparative performance ratings are relative ratings derived from comparing an employee’s performance to others, or in some cases comparing their performance to those of a relevant comparison group (i.e., all other employees who share the same job).

Among the many kinds of comparative performance ratings, such as forced distributions (e.g., Scullen, Bergey, & Aiman-Smith, 2005), paired comparisons (e.g., Siegel, 1982), and ranked comparisons (e.g., Miner, 1988), one particularly well-researched and optimized method is the relative percentile method (RPM; Goffin et al., 1996).

The RPM was designed to take advantage of many of the best features of relative ratings. According to Goffin and Olson (2011), there are several ways to optimize relative ratings, including: evaluating global aspects of performance, using a salient and diverse group as a referent instead of a single individual, and ensuring the same referent group is used for all comparisons. The RPM was designed to take advantage of all these features (Goffin & Olson, 2011), however, the same cannot be said for other types of relative comparison tools such as forced distribution ratings which are far more limited in their design and do not take advantage of many of these ideal features of relative ratings. The RPM works by scaling the performance rating an individual receives relative to that of a comparison group. In doing so, the ratings take the form of percentile scores, which indicate the percentage of relevant others whose level of performance the target employee exceeds (Goffin et al., 1996). Another key feature of this rating method is that unlike traditional performance ratings, which are typically assigned one at a time,
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Raters are encouraged to conduct their ratings for all ratees at the same time. Although this is primarily done to encourage the social comparison process, this also discourages raters from giving out identical ratings to employees who may in fact differ in their actual levels of performance (Goffin & Olson, 2011). This also encourages raters to give a greater range of ratings, which in turn facilitates greater differentiation amongst the top and bottom performers and thereby reduce leniency and inflation of performance scores (Moon, Scullen, Latham, 2017).

Research has found that social-comparative performance ratings offer potential benefits over traditional absolute performance ratings (Goffin et al., 1996; Goffin et al., 2009; Goffin & Olson, 2011; Wagner & Goffin, 1997). These benefits include improved criterion-related validity (Freund & Kasten, 2012; Goffin et al., 1996; Goffin et al., 2009), improved accuracy (Wagner & Goffin, 1997), improved rater agreement for self-ratings (Mabe & West, 1982), and reduced leniency in single ratee and multi-source performance ratings (Feeney, Goffin, Daljeet, Factor & Doyle, 2018; Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016). Moreover, those who receive social-comparative performance ratings report that they have a better idea of what aspects of their work performance could be improved and a greater intention to make use of the feedback they received compared to those who received absolute feedback (Doyle, Goffin & Daljeet, 2016).

As of 2009, fewer than 4% of published studies on performance appraisal used social-comparative performance ratings (Goffin et al., 2009). Similarly, an exploratory study on performance management practices conducted in 2017 found that although 31% of 101 organizations surveyed reported use of both relative and absolute performance ratings, only 17% primarily used relative ratings, and an even smaller 4% reported that they primarily use the RPM (Gorman, et al., 2017). Given the considerable body of empirical evidence demonstrating the potential advantages of social-comparative performance ratings, it is unclear at present why
researchers, practitioners, and organizations are not making use of social-comparative performance ratings. It is somewhat paradoxical that the adoption rates for this performance evaluation approach have been so low, and it is not entirely clear why this is the case.

Accordingly, the purpose of the present program of research is to conduct a pair of exploratory investigations to identify whether there are individual differences that facilitate the acceptance of, or preferences for, social-comparative performance feedback. In doing so we hope to identify whether or not people with certain attributes are more amenable to being the recipients of social-comparative feedback in comparison to others. Given the advantages of relative performance measures, it would benefit researchers, practitioners, and organizations alike to identify whether there are any personality traits and individual differences associated with facilitating the acceptance of, or having a preference for, social-comparative performance ratings and feedback.

One potential explanation for the low adoption rates of relative performance management systems stems from the growing body of evidence that raters and ratees react negatively towards relative performance ratings (Feeney et al., 2016; Roch, Sternburgh & Caputo, 2007). In the first study, I will evaluate the role of affect and emotion regulation in reactions to feedback and how this may differentially relate to relative performance ratings, in comparison to traditional, absolute performance ratings. Previous research suggests that individual differences in affect and emotion regulation should play a role in the extent to which people accept feedback, which may in turn have implications for identifying when and for whom relative feedback may be most useful.

Furthermore, researchers have found that job seekers pay attention to the various human-resource management features of an organization during the recruitment process, including how performance will be evaluated and how rewards will be distributed (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1990;
Wayne & Casper 2012). Moreover, some individuals have demonstrated a preference for the type of performance management system a company uses to evaluate them (Blume, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2013). Thus, the purpose and primary contribution of the second study is to identify whether this preference for certain types of performance evaluation system extends to relative, or social-comparative performance rating systems. We seek to identify whether individuals characterized by certain personality traits and individual differences are more likely to demonstrate this preference. In doing so, this may allow researchers and practitioners to make targeted use of social-comparative performance ratings and increase their use by providing them to those who may be interested in receiving these types of ratings.
References


Chapter 2

Individual Differences in Affective Reactions to Absolute and Social-Comparative Feedback

Even the most advanced performance management systems will fail if raters and ratees reject the feedback they are given (Keeping & Levy, 2000; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Wallace, Stelman, & Chafee, 2016). Reactions to, and subsequent acceptance of, performance feedback are a critical part of improving performance in the workplace. Moreover, negative reactions to performance ratings and feedback have been theoretically linked to reduced levels of subsequent performance (Ilgen & Davis, 2000; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Kluger & Denisi, 1996). Feedback acceptance encompasses a variety of important outcomes. Consistent with various definitions of feedback acceptance (Ilgen et al., 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), feedback acceptance refers to the various ways a recipient can react to the feedback including: affective reactions, fairness perceptions, perceived utility, achievability, perceived accuracy, satisfaction with the feedback, and clarity of the feedback (Kedharnath, Garrison, & Gibbons, 2010; Keeping & Levy, 2000).

Unfortunately, both raters and ratees seem to have negative reactions when faced with relative performance ratings and feedback, which is one potential explanation for their low rates of adoption (Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016; Roch, Sternburgh & Caputo, 2007). Despite their psychometric superiority, previous research has consistently found that raters and ratees react negatively towards relative performance measures and feedback (Feeney et al., 2016; Roch et al., 2007). Two studies on the differences between performance rating formats provide evidence that those conducting performance evaluations perceive relative ratings as less fair and less accurate and that recipients of relative feedback tend to react negatively towards it (Feeney
et al., 2016; Roch et al., 2007). In a study examining differences in the perceptions of fairness between absolute and relative performance ratings, researchers found that relative rating formats were consistently perceived as less fair than absolute rating formats across two studies. However, among the three different types of relative ratings examined in this study (forced distribution scales, paired comparison scales, and the Relative Percentile Method; RPM), the RPM was perceived as the fairest (Roch et al., 2007). In one study, participants rated the perceived justice and accuracy of a series of vignettes where an individual was undergoing a performance evaluation. They found that the absolute rating format was regarded as more procedurally just than the relative rating format. This effect was most pronounced in vignettes where the ratee received high performance ratings. Neither the absolute nor relative rating formats were perceived as most accurate across all conditions. However, in vignettes where the ratee was given a lower performance rating, the RPM was perceived as more accurate (Roch et al., 2007). Additionally, it is worth noting that Roch et al.’s (2007) characterization of the RPM is inconsistent with the way the RPM has been typically used and implemented in previous studies (e.g., Doyle et al., 2016; Feeney et al., 2016; Goffin et al., 1996; Goffin & Olson, 2011). It is possible that these misrepresentations skewed findings pertaining to perceptions of fairness and accuracy.

On the other hand, a study on rater’s reactions to rating formats found that when feedback was negative, there were differences in perceived fairness and accuracy across relative and absolute conditions (Feeney, et al., 2016). In their study, participants were asked to watch, then rate a series of pre-recorded videos of researchers giving lectures using either absolute (Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales; BARS) or relative performance ratings (the RPM). Although raters produced more accurate ratings when using relative ratings, they perceived
relative ratings to be less fair and less accurate compared to absolute ratings. In sum, these findings suggest that relative ratings are viewed less positively than absolute ratings and that people tend to react less well them.

One possible explanation for these generally poor reactions towards relative ratings comes from Feedback Intervention Theory (Kluger & Denisi, 1996). Broadly speaking, Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) aims to explain the processes and consequences involved in providing a recipient with a feedback intervention. FIT maintains that a feedback intervention (i.e., performance feedback) influences behaviour by drawing attention, a limited resource, to the discrepancy between feedback and goals or expected levels of performance. In doing so, performance feedback will direct the attention of the recipient to one of three hierarchically organized characteristics of the feedback as a means of influencing future outcomes. Within-person processes (e.g., affective reactions) are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by task-learning and task-performance processes, and task-motivation processes are at the bottom. Although the goal of most feedback interventions is to target and influence task learning and performance processes, performance feedback often first directs the attention of the recipient to within-person processes.

FIT states that all normative (i.e., relative feedback), shifts the level of attention away from task processes and towards within-person processes (Kluger & Denisi, 1996). Relative feedback calls direct attention to how an individual performs relative to others thereby highlighting the gap between the performance of the ratee and the performance of others (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYpere, & Dakof, 1990; Kluger & Denisi, 1996). This in turn may result in an increased negative affective reaction towards relative feedback because, according to FIT, ratees do not wish to draw attention to themselves and the gap in their performance relative to
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others. On the other hand, absolute feedback by its very nature does not encourage recipients to compare themselves and their performance to others and instead directs the ratees’ attention towards task-related processes (Kluger & Denisi, 1996). This is important to consider because researchers have argued that the initial reaction to the feedback is an important determinant of whether or not the feedback will be accepted (London & Smither, 2002; Smither, London & Riley, 2005; Walker et al., 2010).

At present, no investigation has directly examined whether receiving relative feedback will engender a negative affective response from ratees, therefore we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Recipients of negative relative performance feedback will experience greater negative affect compared to those who receive negative absolute performance feedback.

Previous research has established that affective reactions play an important role in how ratees perceive, and accept feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979; Bell & Arthur, 2008; Smither et al., 2005; Atwater & Brett, 2005). A study by Bell and Arthur (2008) directly investigated the role of affect in feedback acceptance. In their study participants completed a developmental assessment center and received performance ratings from a team of assessors and completed measures assessing affect reactions and feedback acceptance. The positive relationship between the ratings that they received, and their subsequent acceptance of the feedback was mediated by participants’ affective reactions to the feedback. The results of this study suggest that more favorable affective reactions to feedback will facilitate greater acceptance of the feedback. Therefore, more negative affective reactions should reduce the extent to which participants are accepting of the feedback. In accordance with FIT this would suggest recipients of relative feedback will experience negative affect in response to the relative feedback and therefore be
less accepting of it. Based on the findings of Bell and Arthur (2008) the extent to which ratees’ experience a negative affective reaction to feedback should influence subsequent acceptance of and reactions to the feedback. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2:** When feedback is negative, the relationship between feedback type (absolute vs relative) and feedback acceptance will be mediated by negative affect.

As previously discussed, FIT suggests all recipients of relative feedback will have greater negative affective responses to the feedback compared to receiving absolute feedback (Kluger & Denisi, 1996). Perhaps it is the case that FIT lacks specificity and nuance in this regard as the theory does not account for the fact that there are different kinds of relative feedback. It may be the case that under certain circumstances people may have positive reactions to relative feedback, affective and otherwise. According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), when an individual feels they are superior to another they make what is called a ‘downwards comparison’ and they compare themselves to someone they believe they are better than. On the other hand, if an individual feels their performance is worse off than another individual they will make an ‘upwards’ comparison’ that is, they will compare themselves to someone who they believe is better than themselves. Therefore, according to social comparison theory, when feedback is positive and relative, individuals should be making downwards comparisons which should result in positive affective reactions by generating positive feelings of superiority and success. This, in contrast to FIT, opens the doors for recipients of relative feedback to have positive reactions (affective and otherwise) to relative feedback. This is especially important given that we previously propose that the primary mechanism driving reactions to feedback is the affective reactions individuals have to the feedback. Furthermore, the results of the study by Bell
and Arthur (2008) would suggest that positive affective reactions to relative feedback should mediate acceptance of this type of feedback. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3:** Positive affect will mediate the relationship between feedback type (absolute vs relative) and feedback acceptance, when feedback itself is positive.

**Emotion Regulation**

Emotion regulation refers to the process by which people modulate and control their emotions (Gross, 1998; Gross & John 2003). According to the process model of emotion regulation, there are two dominant strategies used to regulate emotions: emotional reappraisal and emotional suppression. Emotional reappraisal is an emotion regulation strategy that characterizes emotions as antecedents to context-relevant behaviours (Gross, 1998; 2002). Specifically, emotions are modified or addressed before they elicit a physiological or behavioural response. For example, an individual might make themselves frame the performance feedback they receive as ways to improve at work, instead of thinking of it as parts of a job they are not good at. On the other hand, emotional suppression is a response focused emotion regulation strategy. This strategy involves modulating emotions that have already begun to have a behavioural or physical impact on an individual (Gross, 1998). For instance, an individual might try to downplay anxiety felt during a job interview.

Previous research has demonstrated that emotion regulation, specifically emotional reappraisal, moderates the relationship between receiving negative performance feedback and future performance (Raftery & Bizer, 2008). Moreover, as explicated by Bell and Arthur (2008), the way in which participants emotionally react to performance feedback can have implications for whether the feedback is accepted. In a study examining differences in the ability to control affective responses, individuals who employ emotion reappraisal strategies experienced more
positive affect and less negative affect than non-reappraisers (Gross & John, 2003). Moreover, individuals who engage in emotion suppression strategies were found to experience less positive affect and more negative affect that those who did not engage in emotional suppression (Gross & John, 2003). Taken together, these results suggest that controlling the degree to which recipients of feedback experience negative affect in response to the feedback, should, in turn, improve the extent to which they accept, and react favorably towards the feedback they receive. Accordingly, we hypothesize that

**Hypothesis 4a:** When feedback is negative, emotion reappraisal will moderate the relationship between feedback type (absolute versus relative) and feedback acceptance, as mediated by negative affect. The strength of the mediated relationship will be weaker to the extent that emotion reappraisal is high.

On the other hand, these findings suggest that emotion suppression is an ineffective strategy for mitigating negative affect and may in fact exacerbate the degree to which one experiences negative affect. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 4b:** When feedback is negative, emotion suppression will moderate the relationship between feedback type (absolute vs relative) and feedback acceptance, as mediated by negative affect. The strength of the mediated relationship will be stronger to the extent that emotion suppression is high.

**Methods**

**Participants**

In total, 375 participants were recruited for this study through Amazon’s online survey and data collection platform, Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Only participants who were presently employed were eligible to complete the study and they were required to use a device with a working microphone. After removing participants who did not complete the study (n = 27),
failed the direct-response careless responding checks (n = 121), and those who told us not to use
their data (n = 4) 255 participants remained. The attrition of participants due to careless
responding did not substantially differ by experimental condition. Participant age ranged from
18-69 years of age (M = 36.76, SD = 10.63). All participants were employed, and a slight
majority identified as female (54%). Additionally, 76% of participants reported having
experience providing performance feedback to others at work. At present there is no way to
calculate an exact point-estimate for the power of the most complex analysis that will be used in
the present study, moderated mediation analyses. However, according to simulation work by
Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), a sample size of between 100 and 200 that employs boot-
strapped moderated mediation analyses should approach 80% power for moderate sized
regression coefficients. We expect our relationships to be of similar magnitude to those reported
in Bell and Arthur (2008) and their work on performance related variables and affect.
Accordingly, we anticipate that we will have achieved sufficient power to execute moderated
mediation analyses.

Materials

Demographics. Participants were asked to provide demographic information such as age,
gender, and employment status.

Performance Feedback. Participants were given predetermined feedback about their
task performance according to three criteria: organization, communication, and persuasiveness.
These criteria were chosen based on the job description and list of required skills for real-estate
sales agents on O*Net (Listing #41-9022.00; Peterson et al., 2001). The participants received
either positive or negative feedback which was presented using either absolute or relative rating
scales. Graphic Rating Scales (GRS; Taylor & Hastman, 1956) ranging from 0 (very poor) to
100 (excellent) were used to provide absolute feedback. Relative ratings were presented using the Relative Percentile Method (Goffin et al., 1996), which provides relative feedback using percentile-based scores that range from 0 (far below average salesperson) to 100 (far above average salesperson). Scores on this scale represent the proportion of the population that falls below the provided rating. For example, a score of 50 would communicate that the participant performed better than half of all others, indicating average performance (See Appendix A).

The predetermined positive and negative performance scores were derived from the distribution of performance scores from a previously completed study by Feeney, Goffin, Daljeet, Factor, and Doyle (2018) on multi-source feedback. In this study, participants were asked to complete a similar task (a sales pitch) and had their performance rated out of 100 by multiple raters. Using the performance scores from this study, we calculated scores that were 1.25, 1.5, and 1.75 standard deviations above and below the mean to use as positive and negative performance scores respectively. These scores were paired with the performance dimensions being evaluated (organization, communication, and persuasiveness). Positive absolute scores were identified as 83 (organization), 87 (communication), and 92 (persuasiveness), whereas negative absolute scores were identified as 37, 32, and 28, respectively. Similarly, positive relative scores were identified as the 78th (organization), 82nd (communication), and 87th (persuasiveness) percentiles, whereas negative relative scores were identified as the 32nd, 28th, and 23rd percentiles, respectively. Participants who received Absolute feedback were coded as 1, and participants who received Relative feedback were coded as 2.

**Feedback Acceptance.** Feedback acceptance was measured using 30 items in total (see Appendix B), of which, 23 were adapted from Kedharnath et al. (2010). The items reflect five subscales: accuracy (3 items), self-awareness (4 items), fairness (4 items), achievability (3 items), and...
items), clarity (3 items), and intent to use (6 items). The internal consistency reliabilities for all six subscales exceeded .80. Five of the remaining items were taken from the utility subscale within the feedback orientation scale developed by Linderbaum and Levy (2010). The internal consistency reliability for this subscale is .86. The authors also provide evidence in support of the subscale’s validity. The items used to measure feedback acceptance were all modified to suit the context of the present study. Lastly, two items taken from Doyle et al. (2016) reflect the degree to which the feedback compared their performance to that of others, for which the authors reported an internal consistency of .68. Participants responded to all items using a a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

**Affect.** Participants were asked to complete a slightly modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This measure contains 10-item subscales for positive affect and negative affect. Participants responded to items in this measure using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Following the example of Reich and Herschovics (2010), we slightly modified the response instructions and item stems for the measure to better fit the context of our study (See Appendix C). We modified the instructions of the measure to ask participants that they respond to each item and indicate the extent to which the feedback they received in our study made them experience the specific emotions specified in the items. A sample item from the negative affect subscale with the modified item stem reads “Did the feedback you received make you feel upset?”, and a sample item from the positive affect subscale reads “Did the feedback you received make you feel strong.” Watson et al. (1988) found that the internal consistency ranged from .84 to .87 for the positive affect subscale and .86 to .90 for the negative affect subscale. In addition, they also provided evidence in support of the measure’s validity.
Emotion Regulation. To measure emotion regulation, participants were asked to complete the 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (REQ; Gross & John, 2003). This measure contains two subscales: cognitive reappraisal (6-items) and expressive suppression (4-items). Participants responded to items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Gross and John (2003) found the internal consistency of the two subscales ranged from .68 to .82 and provided evidence in support of the measure’s validity.

Follow up Questions. Participants were presented with follow-up questions and statements about how real they believed the study was and how much effort they put into completing the study. Participants responded to the items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Participants were presented with the following statements: “I put effort into presenting the sales pitch”, “I took the feedback that was presented to me seriously”, “I believe that the feedback that was presented to me was real”, “I believe that the feedback given to me did in fact come from a panel of experts”, and “I think real-estate sales pitches should be evaluated using this approach”.

Careless Responding. Careless or inattentive responders were identified in four ways based on best practice recommendations (Meade & Craig, 2012). First, participants were asked to complete five directed-response items (e.g., “Please respond strongly disagree to this item”) embedded throughout the questionnaire portion of the study. Finally, at the end of the study and before participants were debriefed, participants were asked to respond “yes” or “no” to the question “In your honest opinion, should we use your data in our analyses in this study?” Participants who responded “no” to the latter question, and participants who incorrectly answered any of the aforementioned directed-response items were removed from all analyses.

Procedure
Participants were recruited online via Mturk. Before providing consent, participants were asked to comply with a hardware test to check whether they had a working microphone connected to their device and self-report the results. Likewise, potential participants were also pre-screened for their employment status. Participants who indicated they had a working microphone and were employed continued on to review the remainder of the letter of information and were given the option to provide their informed consent.

Participants were recruited under the guise of helping researchers evaluate the effectiveness of real-estate sales pitches to help develop an online, avatar-based sales system for a large national real-estate company. Participants were instructed to record a mock real-estate sales pitch and submit it to a panel of online real-estate experts who would evaluate their pitch upon submission. They were also told that those who exceed the expectations of the panel of evaluators may be offered a job at the real-estate company the researchers were working with (see Appendix D). In reality, there was no panel of experts conducting evaluations nor was there a job to be earned. This deception was necessary to encourage participants to put forth maximum effort into their sales pitch and enhance the psychological fidelity of the scenario.

At the outset of the study, participants were given information about the criteria that would be used to evaluate them (see Appendix E), followed by information about a piece of real-estate for them to present in their sales pitch (see Appendix F). Participants were told to use this information and to record a mock sales pitch (a maximum of two minutes in length) as though a prospective buyer was listening. Participants reviewed the information without a time limit. Participants were instructed to click a button on their screen to connect them with the live panel of evaluators. At this point, participants were shown a video of four confederates appearing to attentively watch a computer screen and were told that these individuals were the panel
evaluating their sales pitch (see Appendix G). Next, participants were shown “start/stop recording” and “submit” buttons onscreen which they could use to record their sales pitch when ready (see Appendix H).

After recording and submitting their sales pitch, participants were told their recording would be evaluated and the feedback would be returned to them. Following this, participants completed measures of emotion regulation. Participants were then randomly assigned fictitious positive or negative feedback regarding their performance and the feedback was presented using absolute or relative ratings. Next, participants were asked to complete measures of affect and feedback reactions. Last, participants were asked to provide demographic information and answer follow-up questions about effortful responding before being debriefed.

**Results**

Means, SDs, correlations, and Cronbach’s alphas for the main variables are reported in Table 1. The Means and SDs of variables broken down by experimental conditions are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. PROCESS Macro version 3.5 for SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) was used to evaluate all mediation and moderated-mediation hypotheses and our 95% confidence intervals (CI) were constructed based on 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants who received negative relative performance feedback would experience greater levels of negative affect compared to those who received negative absolute feedback. The mean level of negative affect for individuals who received negative relative feedback ($M = 2.65, SD = 0.83$) was not significantly different ($t[121] = 1.47, p = .14$) from those who received negative absolute feedback ($M = 2.42, SD = 0.84$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

**Mediation Analyses**
Hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested using mediation models (See Figure 1 for a conceptual representation). Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between feedback type (Absolute Feedback = 1, Relative Feedback = 2) and feedback acceptance will be mediated by negative affect when feedback is negative. A summary of the results pertaining to the indirect effects can be found in Table 1. Across all models, the relationship between feedback type and negative affect was not significant ($a = .22, SE = 0.15, CI [-.08, .52]$. In turn, the direct effect of negative affect on feedback accuracy ($b = -.42, SE = 0.12, CI [-.67, -.18]$) was significant and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback accuracy through negative affect was not statistically significant ($ab = -0.09, SE = 0.07, CI [-.26, .03]$). The confidence interval estimating the indirect effect is not statistically significant because it contains 0. The direct effect of negative affect on feedback clarity was significant ($b = -.42, SE = 0.11, CI [-.63, -.20]$) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback clarity through negative affect was not significant ($ab = -0.09, SE = 0.07, CI [-.25, .03]$). The direct effect of negative affect on comparativeness ($b = -.20, SE = 0.12, CI [-.43, .03]$) was not significant and the indirect effect of feedback type on comparativeness through negative affect was also not significant ($ab = -0.04, SE = 0.04, CI [-.15, .02]$). The direct effect of negative affect on feedback fairness was significant ($b = -.54, SE = 0.11, CI [-.77, -.32]$) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback fairness through negative affect was not significant ($ab = -0.12, SE = 0.09, CI [-.31, .04]$). The direct effect of negative affect on intention to use feedback was significant ($b = -.25, SE = 0.12, CI [-.48, -.02]$) and the indirect effect of feedback type on intention to use feedback through negative affect was not significant ($ab = -0.09, SE = 0.05, CI [-.18, .02]$). The direct effect of negative affect on feedback self-awareness was significant ($b = -.23, SE = 0.11, CI [-.45, -.01]$) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback self-awareness through negative affect was also not significant ($ab = -0.05, SE = 0.05$).
Lastly, direct effect of negative affect on utility was significant \( (b = -.18, SE = 0.08, CI [-.33, -.03]) \) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback utility was also not significant \( (ab = -0.04, SE =0.03, CI [-.12, .01]) \). Therefore Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between feedback type (Absolute Feedback = 1, Relative Feedback = 2) and feedback acceptance will be mediated by positive affect when feedback is positive. A summary of the results pertaining to the indirect effects can be found in Table 4. Across all models, the relationship between feedback type and positive affect was significant \( (a = -.30, SE = 0.15, CI [-.59, 01]) \). The direct effect of positive affect on feedback accuracy was significant \( (b = .53, SE = 0.10, CI [.33, .73]) \) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback accuracy through positive affect was also significant \( (ab = -0.16, SE = 0.09, CI [-.35, -.01]) \). The direct effect of positive affect on feedback clarity was significant \( (b = .33, SE = 0.08, CI [.17, .48]) \) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback clarity through positive affect was not significant \( (ab = -0.10, SE =0.05, CI [-.20, .00]) \). The direct effect of positive affect on comparativeness was significant \( (b = .56, SE = 0.09, CI [.38, .75]) \) and the indirect effect of feedback type on comparativeness through positive affect was also significant \( (ab = -0.17, SE =0.09, CI [-.34, -.01]) \). The direct effect of positive affect on feedback fairness was significant \( (b = .52, SE = 0.08, CI [.36, .69]) \) and he indirect effect of feedback type on feedback fairness through positive affect was also significant \( (ab = -0.16, SE = 0.08, CI [-.33, -.01]) \). Similarly, the direct effect of positive affect on intention to use feedback was significant \( (b = .59, SE = 0.09, CI [.42, .76]) \) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback intention to use feedback through positive affect was found to be significant \( (ab = -0.18, SE = 0.09, CI [-.37, -.01]) \). The direct effect of positive affect on feedback self-awareness significant \( (b = .65, SE = 0.08, CI [.48, .81]) \), and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback self-awareness through
positive affect was found to be significant \((ab = -0.19, SE = 0.10, CI [-.40, -.01])\). Lastly, the direct effect of positive affect on feedback utility was significant \((b = 0.45, SE = 0.07, CI [.31, .58])\) and the indirect effect of feedback type on feedback utility through positive affect was also significant \((ab = -0.13, SE = 0.07, CI [-.27, -.01])\). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was predominantly supported.

**Moderated Mediation Analyses**

Hypothesis 4a predicted that when feedback was negative, emotional reappraisal would moderate the relationship between feedback type and feedback acceptance as mediated by negative affect. More specifically, it was predicted that the strength of the mediated relationship would be weaker to the extent that emotion reappraisal is high. To evaluate our moderated-mediation hypotheses for Hypothesis 4a and 4b (See Figure 2 for a conceptual summary), we used we use Model 7 from the PROCESS macro and examined the linear index of moderated mediation (IMM; Hayes, 2015) and the results of the following analyses are summarized in Table 5. The IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback accuracy, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, \(\beta = -.06, SE = .10, CI (-.25, .15)\). Next, the IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback clarity, as mediated by negative affect was also not significant, \(\beta = -.08, SE = .12, CI (-.29, .20)\). The IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback comparativeness, as mediated by negative affect, was also not significant \(\beta = -.04, SE = .07, CI (-.19, .11)\). The IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback fairness, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, \(\beta = -.10, SE = .16, CI (-.36, .26)\). The IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and intention to use feedback, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, \(\beta = -.05, SE = .
The IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback self-awareness, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = -.04, \ SE = .07, \ CI (-.20, .11)$. Lastly, the IMM for emotional reappraisal on the relationship between feedback type and feedback utility, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = -.03, \ SE = .06, \ CI (-.14, .09)$. Therefore, Hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Hypothesis 4b predicted that when feedback was negative, emotional suppression would moderate the relationship between feedback type and feedback acceptance as mediated by negative affect. More specifically, it was predicted that the strength of the mediated relationship would be weaker to the extent that emotional suppression is high. The IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and feedback accuracy, as mediated by negative affect, was $\beta = .08, \ SE = .09, \ CI (-.10, .27)$ and therefore not significant. Next, the IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and feedback clarity, as mediated by negative affect, was also not significant, $\beta = .08, \ SE = .09, \ CI (-.11, .25)$. The IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and feedback comparativeness, as mediated by negative affect, was also not significant, $\beta = .04, \ SE = .05, \ CI (-.05, .16)$. The IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and feedback fairness, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = -.10, \ SE = .11, \ CI (-.14, .32)$. The IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and intention to use feedback, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = .05, \ SE = .06, \ CI (-.07, .19)$. The IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between feedback type and feedback self-awareness, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = .04, \ SE = .06, \ CI (-.06, .16)$. Lastly, the IMM for emotional suppression on the relationship between
feedback type and feedback utility, as mediated by negative affect, was not significant, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .04$, CI (-.04, .14). Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

### Analysis of Follow up Questions

Lastly, we examined the responses to the follow-up questions that participants were asked. The first follow up question participants were asked to respond to was the statement “I put effort into presenting the sales pitch.” The mean response to this item was 2.84 ($SD = 1.42$) and 56% of participants endorsed this item with either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. Next, participants responded to the statement, “I took the feedback that was presented to me seriously.” The mean response to this item was 2.82 ($SD = 1.39$). However, only 48% of participants endorsed this item with either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. Importantly, the mean response to the statement “I believe that the feedback that was presented to me is real” was 2.90 ($SD = 1.47$) and only response only 41% of participants endorsed this item with either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. Similarly, in response to the statement “I believe that the feedback given to me did in fact come from a panel of experts” participants mean response was 2.93 ($SD = 1.45$), and 38% of participants endorsed this item with either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. Lastly, participant’s mean response to the item “I think real-estate sales pitches should be evaluated using this approach” was 2.38 ($SD = 1.31$) and only 21% of participants endorsed this item with either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

### Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the role of affect (positive or negative) and emotion regulation in reactions to receiving positive versus negative, absolute versus relative performance ratings. However, with limited exception, the results of the present study do not support the claims that affective reactions, or emotion regulation play a role in reactions to
relative or absolute receiving feedback. In addition to addressing the aforementioned hypotheses, another key contribution of the present study was the advancement of a novel methodology that can be used and adapted to study performance management as well as the performance rating process.

Our first hypothesis predicted that recipients of negative relative performance feedback would experience greater negative affect compared to those who received equivalent absolute feedback, however there was no support for this hypothesis. Although FIT implies that feedback that involves comparing oneself to others will engender a negative affective reaction (Kluger & Denisi, 1996), one possible explanation for why this hypothesis was not supported is that FIT is not sufficiently specific or nuanced enough to account for different types of relative feedback. In most cases, relative feedback involves comparing the performance of one specific individual to that of another specific individual (Roch et al., 2007). However, the style of relative feedback used in this study (RPM) involves comparing an individual’s performance to that of a referent group, not another specific individual. Accordingly, it may be the case that the anticipated negative affective reaction to relative feedback is specific to certain types of relative feedback that involve direct person-to-person comparisons rather than persons to referent-group comparisons. This would offer one explanation for why we found no effect as any negative affective reaction that may have been triggered by the ratings and feedback delivered via the RPM might be not be substantially different from the reaction produced by receiving traditional absolute feedback that does not involve person-to-person comparisons either. In future studies, researchers may be interested in revisiting this relationship using different types of relative ratings involving direct person-to-person comparisons, such as ranked comparisons and, forced distribution ratings.
Researchers have presented theory and empirical evidence demonstrating that affective reactions impact how people perceive, accept, and respond to performance feedback (Atwater & Brett, 2005; Bell & Arthur, 2008; Ilgen et al., 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Smither et al., 2005). Our second hypothesis was that when feedback was negative, the relationship between receiving absolute or relative feedback and the acceptance of the feedback would be mediated by negative affect. However, our results did not support this hypothesis. A possible explanation is that participants may not have believed that the feedback was genuine and therefore may not have reacted authentically. Additionally, the negative feedback scores assigned to participants were very low. The average absolute score was 32 while the average relative score was 21. According to research by Cappelli and Conyon (2018), most employees receive performance rating scores that are above average and even low scores tend to fall above the midpoint of the scale. Given the relatively straightforward nature of the task, participants may have perceived a discrepancy between their performance and the feedback they received, leading to a decrease in the credibility of the feedback. Among participants who received negative feedback, 49% who received absolute feedback and 47% who received relative feedback indicated that they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with the statement, “I believe that the feedback that was presented to me is real”. In contrast, 38% of participants who received negative relative feedback ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’, as did 36% of those who received negative absolute feedback. In the future, researchers may wish to adopt either a different methodology wherein participants are provided with feedback in real-time, or modify the design of the study such that participants perform a task and are provided with actual feedback on their performance at a later point in time. Alternatively, researchers could work to develop a different cover story that participants might find more convincing, thus encouraging them to believe the feedback presented to them is
real. For example, one based around a marketing or sales competition as this would allow for a scenario wherein participants would have good reason to participate in a task that would need evaluating and warrant receiving feedback on.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that when feedback was positive, positive affect would mediate the relationship between receiving either absolute or relative feedback and feedback acceptance. Broadly speaking, this hypothesis was supported. When feedback was positive, the relationship between receiving relative or absolute feedback and feedback accuracy, feedback fairness, intent to use feedback, feedback self-awareness, feedback comparativeness, and feedback utility, were all mediated by positive affect. This effect was not found for feedback clarity as no evidence was found in support of positive feedback as a mediator of the relationship between receiving relative or absolute feedback and feedback clarity when feedback was positive. The results showed that in the context of this model, those who received absolute rather than relative positive feedback were more likely to experience positive affective, which in turn facilitated feedback acceptance. These findings are consistent with the notion that positive feedback elicits positive reactions (Illes et al., 2007). This finding also provides additional support for the idea that FIT lacks the specificity and nuance to account for different types of relative ratings. FIT suggests that people who receive comparative (i.e., relative) ratings or feedback, regardless of valence (i.e., positive or negative feedback), will likely experience a negative reaction. The implication that even those who receive positive comparative feedback may experience a negative reaction contradicts the findings of previous research grounded in Social Comparison Theory (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). When participants in this study were presented with positive feedback, positive affect facilitated increased acceptance of the feedback. This is in line with previous research grounded in Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) which showed that making a positive comparison tends to
result in downward social comparisons that, in turn, engender positive affective outcomes (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). That is, the findings of the present study are consistent with other research grounded in Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and inconsistent with the way in which FIT suggests people will respond to positive comparative feedback. On a more practical note, these findings suggest that practitioners may wish to encourage the use of positive feedback in the workplace, which is consistent with other recommendations and findings from the performance management literature (Nowack & Mashihi, 2012). As previously mentioned, when positive feedback was presented, positive affect facilitated a greater acceptance of the feedback. Therefore, if managers and practitioners were to encourage those providing feedback to frame the feedback in a positive manner, it may increase the likelihood of the feedback being accepted by the ratee. Furthermore, researchers may be interested in evaluating whether these findings generalize across different types of relative and absolute rating formats such as behaviourally anchored rating scales and forced distribution ratings.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that when feedback was negative, emotional reappraisal would moderate the relationship between feedback type and feedback acceptance, as mediated by negative affect. Additionally, when feedback was negative, it was anticipated that emotional suppression would moderate the relationship between feedback type and feedback acceptance, as mediated by negative affect. The work of Bell and Arthur (2008) identifies that affective reactions play an important role in how and to what extent feedback is accepted, and the work of Raferty and Bizer (2008), as well as Gross and John (2003) suggest that the extent to which individuals control their (negative) emotional reactions will be reflected in their inclination to accept feedback they receive. Accordingly, there is a theoretical basis for the notion that one or
both of emotional reappraisal and emotional suppression would moderate the relationship between feedback type and feedback acceptance, as mediated by negative affect.

Contrary to expectations, we found no evidence that negative affect mediated the relationship between feedback type, thereby precluding us from identifying emotion regulation or emotional suppression as a moderator of the unsupported mediated relationship. One possible explanation for this result is based on our finding that nearly half of participants did not believe that the feedback was real. As discussed in the context of the findings pertaining to Hypothesis 2, 49% of participants who received absolute feedback and 47% of those who received relative feedback responded ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to the statement “I believe that the feedback that was presented to me is real”. That is, because many participants did not find the feedback credible, it is possible they may not have felt the need to engage in emotion regulation in response to the feedback.

Interestingly, although not explicitly hypothesized it is worth noting that participants in our study differed in the extent to which they accepted the feedback they were provided with depending on whether the feedback was positive or negative, and absolute or social-comparative in nature. In general, it appeared to be the case that regardless of whether the feedback was positive or negative, those who received social-comparative feedback reported greater levels of feedback acceptance. One possible explanation for this is due to the nature of social-comparative feedback. When social-comparative feedback is provided to a target, regardless of its valence, the feedback involves a person-to-person, or person-to-group comparison. Unlike absolute feedback, social-comparative feedback highlights the gaps between a recipient’s performance and the performance of the relevant others they are being compared with. In the case of negative feedback, being compared to a better performing other (i.e., making an upward comparison) may
yield information and facilitate a better understanding of how to move forward with improving their performance to match, or exceed, that of relevant others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999). By contrast, when feedback is positive, social-comparative feedback typically results in a downwards comparison wherein the target is compared to a worse-off other. Unlike positive absolute feedback, as a result of comparing the target to a worse-off other, the positive social-comparative feedback may provide a considerable amount of ego-enhancing information to the recipient of the feedback. This in turn may facilitate a greater acceptance of the positive social-comparative feedback over the positive absolute feedback.

Notably, participants in the present study reported a significantly greater intention to use the feedback when provided with negative social-comparative, versus negative absolute feedback. This is consistent with the findings of Doyle et al., (2016) who also found that participants in their study reported greater intention to use the feedback they were provided with when they receive negative social-comparative feedback compared to absolute feedback. Importantly, the findings of the present study, along with those of Doyle et al. (2016) provide some support for the proposed explanation regarding the acceptance of negative social-comparative feedback. That is, perhaps it is the case that individuals are more likely to use, and therefore accept, negative feedback generated via social-comparative methods, because unlike absolute methods it provides them with better insight into how they can improve their future performance through the information generated by the comparison to relevant better-off others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Blanton et al., 1999). Given that negative feedback is among the most common type of feedback given to employees in the workplace (Ilgen & Davis, 2000), this finding has important implications for how we provide feedback to employees. For instance, in the context of a performance evaluation perhaps it is the case that managers should be
encouraged to provide employees with negative feedback using a social-comparative format, as doing so will increase the likelihood they will make use if the feedback, compared to presenting it via absolute feedback. Consequently, the increased intention to use social-comparative feedback further underscores the value of and need to continue conducting research on the applications of social-comparative feedback in the context of the workplace.

**Methodological Contribution**

Another important contribution made by the present study is the preliminary development and advancement of the methodology used to evaluate elements of the performance management and performance rating process. Specifically, the study employed a novel design where participants recorded themselves performing a task, which they were told will be evaluated by a panel of experts, whose faces they are shown. Although we used this methodology to examine how participants would react to feedback, this methodological design can be used to study any of a number of important components in the performance management process. For example, as part of the present study we received ethics approval to retain and analyze the audio files of the participants’ sales pitches. The sales pitches could be evaluated by a group of raters and treated as a form of task-performance. The future analysis of the sales pitches is just one example of how this methodology can be used to generate additional, and potentially interesting research contributions. However, as will be discussed below in greater detail below, this was the first study to use this methodology and a lack of pilot testing may have resulted in some limitations to this methodology which can be addressed in future research.

**Limitations**

As is the case with all studies, this study is not without its limitations. One of the primary limitations of this study is that many participants did not believe that the feedback was based on
their actual performance and provided by a panel of experts. This may have resulted from elements of the cover story not having been fully credible, such as the notion that the researchers were assisting a company with developing an ‘avatar-based sales system’. The lack of believability may have decreased participant engagement and consequently may have limited the psychological fidelity of the study, possibly contributing to the inconsistencies between our predictions and results. The cover story used in the present study was not pilot tested in advance, future researchers looking to use this methodology should consider pilot testing a variety of contexts and cover stories that are more likely to be accepted as true by participants to help facilitate the acceptance of the cover story.

Similarly, other elements of the study design may have placed an upper limit on the psychological fidelity of the study. Bernardin and Villanova (1986) advance the argument that even well-designed laboratory studies intended to study some element of performance appraisals do not fully capture the psychological reality of the performance management process. The authors developed a list of 15 design considerations that performance management studies should consider when developing their studies to help facilitate psychological fidelity as well as external validity, they refer to this as the modal criterion setting. Despite our best efforts we were only able to implement a limited number of the 15 design considerations advanced by Bernardin and Villanova (1986) into the present study. The present study employs a highly novel and innovative design to study performance management, specifically how ratees respond to different types of performance ratings. However, the study may have been lacking in realism and the novel method and its implementation may simultaneously have placed an upper limit on the psychological fidelity and external validity of the study. For example, in the cover story for the present study, participants were told that the researchers were working with a company that
wanted to create an ‘animated avatar-based sales pitches’ and their data would be used to help develop their ‘machine-learning algorithm’ to detect important sales-related behaviours. Perhaps it was the case that these and other elements of the cover story used in the study may not have been sufficiently believable which, in turn, may have reduced the believability, psychological fidelity, and external validity of the study. Future researchers should find ways to advance the methodology presented here such that it would be possible to implement additional elements from the modal criterion setting presented by Bernardin and Villanova (1986) with hopes that doing so will improve the external validity of the study.

A second limitation to this study is that affect was only measured at one time point. Affect was only evaluated after participants were assigned feedback. That is, we did not evaluate participant’s baseline affect before providing them with the different types of feedback. It is possible then, that the affect participants reported in the study was not exclusively attributable to an affective response they may have had to the feedback they were provided with. Since affect is temporal in nature (Solomon & Corbit, 1974), researchers employing a similar study design may benefit from measuring affect before and after feedback is provided or even concurrently throughout the study as one might in a diary study (Wiles & Cornwell, 1991).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of the present study provide some evidence that when feedback is positive, positive affect plays a role in a ratee’s acceptance of the feedback when receiving absolute versus relative feedback. However, this was not found to be the case when feedback was negative and negative affect was evaluated in place of positive affect. Likewise, based on the results of the present study no evidence was found that emotion regulation alters the strength of the relationship that may exist between receiving either absolute or relative feedback and the
acceptance of the feedback as mediated by affect. Given that such a novel methodology was used in this study, future researchers should consider revisiting the relationships and questions examined in this study using different methodological techniques in order to establish convergence on the validity of the outcomes from this study.
References


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<td>0.53**</td>
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Note. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities are in the parentheses along the diagonals. PosAff = Positive Affect, NegAff = Negative Affect, EMR = Emotional Repression, EMS = Emotional Suppression, Acc = Feedback Accuracy, Achiv = Feedback Achievability, Clear = Feedback Clarity, Comp = Comparativeness, Fair = Feedback Fairness, IntUse = Intention to Use Feedback, Selfaw = Feedback Self-awareness, Utility = Utility of Feedback *p < .05, **p < .01.
Table 2. *Negative Feedback Means and Standard Deviations*

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<tr>
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<th>M (Absolute, n = 67)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M (Relative, n = 58)</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>p</th>
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<td>0.72</td>
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Table 3. Positive Feedback Means and Standard Deviations

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<td>(n = 67)</td>
<td>(n = 63)</td>
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Table 4. Summary of mediation analyses

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<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Feedback Outcome</th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
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<th>CI.LL</th>
<th>CI.UL</th>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
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</table>

Note. Feedback Type = Absolute (= 1) or Relative Feedback (= 2), NegAff = Negative Affect, PosAff = Positive Affect, SE = Standard Error, CI.LL = 95% Confidence Interval Lower Limit, CI.UL = 95% Confidence Interval Upper Limit, Ns. = Not Significant Indirect Effect (CI contained 0), Sig = Significant Indirect Effect (CI did not contain 0).
Table 5. Summary of moderated mediation analyses.

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<th>Hypothesis</th>
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<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Moderator</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Feedback Outcome</th>
<th>IMM</th>
<th>SE</th>
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<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<td>Utility</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>Ns.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Feedback Type = Absolute or Relative Feedback, NegAff = Negative Affect, PosAff = Positive Affect, IMM = Index of Moderated Mediation, SE = Standard Error, CI.LL = 95% Confidence Interval Lower Limit, CI.UL = 95% Confidence Interval Upper Limit, Ns. = Not Significant, Sig = Significant.
Figure 1. A graphical representation of the baseline mediation model tested in study 1. Note. Affect = Positive or Negative affect, Feedback Type = Absolute or Relative feedback, and Feedback Acceptance = Feedback Accuracy, Feedback Self-Awareness, Feedback Fairness, Feedback Achievability, Feedback Clarity, Intent to use Feedback.
Figure 2. A graphical representation of the moderated mediation model tested in study 1. Note. Affect = Positive or Negative affect, Feedback Type = Absolute or Relative feedback, Feedback Acceptance = Feedback Accuracy, Feedback Self-Awareness, Feedback Fairness, Feedback Achievability, Feedback Clarity, Intent to use Feedback, and Emotion Regulation = Cognitive Reappraisal, and Expressive Suppression.
Appendix A

Performance Feedback (Absolute - Positive)

Thank you. Your sales pitch has now been evaluated by the live-evaluators (real-estate experts). So far, they have evaluated more than 200 sales pitches as a part of this process. As mentioned, you were evaluated on: Organization, Communication, Persuasiveness.

Organization
- Sales pitch is well organized
- Maintains continuity (e.g. not excessive pauses or extended breaks)
- Has appropriate structure

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on organization to be a score of **92** out of 100.

Communication
- Projects voice and speaks clearly
- Speaks at a steady pace

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on communication to be a score of **83** out of 100.

Persuasiveness
- Selects important details that matter to the customer
- Ensures that sales pitch is convincing

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on persuasiveness to be a score of **87** out of 100.

Performance Feedback (Absolute - Negative)
Thank you. Your sales pitch has now been evaluated by the live-evaluators (real-estate experts). So far, they have evaluated more than 200 sales pitches as a part of this process.

As mentioned, you were evaluated on: **Organization, Communication, Persuasiveness.**

---

**Organization**

- Sales pitch is well organized
- Maintains continuity (e.g. not excessive pauses or extended breaks)
- Has appropriate structure

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on organization to be a score of **37** out of 100.

Please click next to continue.

---

**Communication**

- Projects voice and speaks clearly
- Speaks at a steady pace

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on communication to be a score of **23** out of 100.

Please click **next** to continue.
Persuasiveness

- Selects important details that matter to the customer
- Ensures that sales pitch is convincing

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your performance on persuasiveness to be a score of 28 out of 100.

Please click next to continue.

Performance Feedback (Relative - Positive)

Thank you. Your sales pitch has now been evaluated by the live-evaluators (real-estate experts). So far, they have evaluated more than 200 sales pitches as a part of this process.

As mentioned, you were evaluated on: Organization, Communication, Persuasiveness

Organization

- Sales pitch is well organized
- Maintains continuity (e.g. not excessive pauses or extended breaks)
- Has appropriate structure

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your sales pitch to be better organized than 87% of the other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less well organized than 13% of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.

Please click next to continue.
Communication

- Projects voice and speaks clearly
- Speaks at a steady pace

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged that the communication in your sales pitch was better than 78% of other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less effective at communication than 22% of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.

Persuasiveness

- Selects important details that matter to the customer
- Ensures that sales pitch is convincing

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your sales pitch to be more persuasive than 82% of the other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less persuasive than 18% of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.

Please click next to continue.
Thank you. Your sales pitch has now been evaluated by the live-evaluators (real-estate experts). So far, they have evaluated more than 200 sales pitches as a part of this process.

As mentioned, you were evaluated on: **Organization, Communication, Persuasiveness**

---

**Organization**

- Sales pitch is well organized
- Maintains continuity (e.g. not excessive pauses or extended breaks)
- Has appropriate structure

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your sales pitch to be better organized than 32% of the other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less well organized than 68% of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.

Please click **next** to continue.

---

**Communication**

- Projects voice and speaks clearly
- Speaks at a steady pace

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged that the communication in your sales pitch was better than 23% of other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less effective at communication than 77% of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.
**Persuasiveness**

- Selects important details that matter to the customer
- Ensures that sales pitch is convincing

Our live-evaluators (real-estate experts) have judged your sales pitch to be more persuasive than **28%** of the other sales pitches they have evaluated.

This means you are less persuasive than **72%** of the other sales pitches that have been evaluated thus far.

Please click **next** to continue.
Appendix B
Feedback Acceptance Questionnaire

Original Source:

Note: The items marked with *** are not from the original measure and were generated by our lab.

All questions are to be responded to using the following 5-point scale:
  a) Strongly disagree
  b) Disagree
  c) Neither Agree Nor Disagree
  d) Agree
  e) Strongly Agree

Accuracy
1) The feedback I received from the live-evaluators about my sales pitch is accurate.
2) The feedback I received from the live-evaluators adequately captured my performance during the sales pitch.
3) I agree with the feedback I received from the live-evaluators about my sales pitch.

Self-Awareness
4) The feedback I received from the live-evaluators about my sales pitch taught me something about myself.
5) After receiving feedback on my sales pitch, I believe I am now more aware of my developmental needs.
6) After receiving feedback on my sales pitch, I believe I am now more aware of my skill strengths.
7) After receiving feedback on my sales pitch, I believe I will be more aware of my performance on sales-related tasks in the future.

Fairness
8) I believe that the feedback criteria used by the live-evaluators for my sales pitch are fair.
9) I feel that the live-evaluators’ feedback process on my sales pitch has been fair.
10) The procedures used by the live-evaluators to evaluate my performance on the sales pitch were fair.
11) I believe that the rating scales used to evaluate my performance on the sales pitch were fair.***

Achievability
12) The feedback on my sales pitch from the live-evaluators leads me to believe that I can improve my performance on subsequent sales pitches.
13) I believe I can successfully improve my performance criteria on the sales pitch task.
14) I believe I can successfully improve on the performance criteria suggested by the live-evaluators in the feedback for my sales pitch.

Clarity
15) The feedback on my sales pitch from the live-evaluators is easy to understand.
16) The way the feedback on my sales pitch from the live-evaluators is presented makes sense.
17) The feedback on my sales pitch from the live-evaluators was well organized.

Intent to use
18) Because of the feedback I received I have identified at least one skill I want to develop for future sales-related tasks.
19) I am likely to consider this feedback from the live-evaluators the next time I am conducting sales-related tasks.
20) I am likely to consider this feedback I received when I encounter opportunities to develop.
21) The feedback I received will influence my effort in the future on sales pitches.
22) I plan on using the feedback to improve my performance on sales-related tasks in the near future.
23) I plan on following these recommendations from the live-evaluators in future sales pitches.

Comparative
24) I believe the feedback provided to me is valuable because it gives me a sense of my performance on sales pitches in comparison to others.***
25) I believe the feedback provided to me makes it clear where I rank among other sales persons.***

The following subscale was taken from:


https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310373145
Utility

26) Feedback contributes to my success at work.
27) To develop my skills at work, I rely on feedback.
28) Feedback is critical for improving performance.
29) Feedback from supervisors can help me advance in a company.
30) I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals.
Appendix C

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

PANAS


This scale consists of a number of words and phrases that describe different feelings and emotions. Please read each item, and indicate to what extent you feel this way, regarding the evaluation on your sales pitch from our live-evaluators.

Note: The labels on the scale anchors have been changed to match the label of the other study variables. Furthermore, the study added the following phrase before each affect to directly refer to the participant’s performance feedback: “Did the feedback that you received make you feel...”.

1. Strongly disagree. 2. Disagree. 3. Neither agree or disagree. 4. Agree. 5. Strongly agree.

1) Did the feedback that you received make you feel interested?

2) Did the feedback that you received make you feel distressed?

3) Did the feedback that you received make you feel excited?

4) Did the feedback that you received make you feel upset?

5) Did the feedback that you received make you feel strong?

6) Did the feedback that you received make you feel guilty?

7) Did the feedback that you received make you feel scared?

8) Did the feedback that you received make you feel hostile?

9) Did the feedback that you received make you feel enthusiastic?

10) Did the feedback that you received make you feel proud?

11) Did the feedback that you received make you feel irritable?

12) Did the feedback that you received make you feel alert?
13) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **ashamed**?

14) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **inspired**?

15) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **nervous**?

16) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **determined**?

17) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **attentive**?

18) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **jittery**?

19) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **active**?

20) Did the feedback that you received make you feel **afraid**?

---

**Original/Unmodified Version of the PANAS**

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment. Use the following scale to record your answers.

- **1** Very slightly or not at all
- **2** A little
- **3** Moderately
- **4** Quite a bit
- **5** Extremely

**or not at all**

**Interested _____**

**Distressed_____**

**Excited _____**

**Upset _____**

**Strong _____**

**Guilty _____**

**Scared _____**

**Hostile _____**

**Enthusiastic _____**

**Proud _____**

**Irritable _____**

**Alert _____**

**Ashamed _____**

**Inspired _____**

**Nervous _____**

**Determined _____**

**Attentive _____**

**Jittery _____**

**Active _____**

**Afraid _____**
Appendix D

Study Task Instructions

At this point in time, we will pair you up with a panel of live-evaluators (real-estate experts). We will also present you with the information you will need to read about a property, so you can deliver and record a sales pitch. Furthermore, we will also explain how you will be evaluated during your sales pitch.

In addition, individuals whose sales pitches exceed the expectations of our live panel of evaluators may be invited to apply for a job with the large national real-estate company we are working with.

Please click "next" to proceed.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Now let’s move on to your task.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

You will be asked to read and memorize some information about a house that is currently for sale. You may take as long as you wish. Based on the information that you read, you will be asked to promote the house for a potential buyer by recording a sales pitch with your microphone using spoken words as best you are able. Please keep your sales pitch to a maximum of 3 minutes.

Your recording will be submitted to the live-evaluators (real-estate experts) immediately after you click the “submit” button. After doing so, the live-evaluators will evaluate your recording and provide you with feedback.
Appendix E

Performance Evaluation Criteria

You will be evaluated on the following three criteria:

**Organization**
- Sales pitch is well organized
- Maintains continuity (e.g. no excessive pauses or extended breaks)
- Has appropriate structure

**Communication**
- Projects voice and speaks clearly
- Speaks at an appropriate pace
- Effective use of hand and bodily gestures (if able)

**Persuasiveness**
- Selects important details that matter to the customer
- Ensures that sales pitch is convincing
Appendix F

Sales Pitch Materials

Please read the description of the house below. You may take as much time as you need.

199 Garden Road
$800 000

- 1700 square feet
- 34 years old
- Stone & brick exterior
- Fake grass on lawn

- Two floors + renovated basement
- 4 bedrooms, 1 kitchen, 2 full bathrooms
- Sound insulation inside all walls
- Laminate flooring
- Central heat & air conditioning

- Backyard pool + patio
- Smoke alarm & outdoor security systems installed
- Wooden fencing surrounding house
Appendix G

Livestream Preview

You have been paired with live-evaluators (real-estate experts) group #07.

Just so you know, here are the assessors who will be evaluating you:
Appendix H

Voice Recording Interface

Reminder: The time limit of the sales pitch is 3 minutes. The recording will end automatically after it reaches the time limit. You can restart and/or pause your recording more than once. However, you can submit the recording only once.
Chapter 3

Study 2 Preface

The purpose of the first study was to explore the potential role of individual differences in the feedback reactions and acceptance process. It was found that when feedback was positive, individual differences such as positive affect were associated with a ratee’s acceptance of absolute and relative feedback. However, the results of the first study found no evidence that the individual differences we examined (e.g., negative affect, and emotion regulation) play a role in a ratee’s acceptance of absolute or relative feedback, when feedback is negative. Therefore, we are unable to provide evidence based on this study that individual differences we examined can be leveraged to mitigate the non-positive reactions ratees sometimes experience when presented with social-comparative performance feedback (Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016; Roch, Sternburgh, & Caputo, 2007). Broadly speaking, the results of this study suggest that the individual differences we examined may only play a very limited role in facilitating people’s reactions to and acceptance of social-comparative performance feedback. However, this does not preclude individual differences from playing a role in other aspects of the feedback process. For instance, it has yet to be determined whether individual differences and personality traits play a role in people’s preferences for different types of feedback.

As previously mentioned, researchers have identified that individuals have preferences for the type of performance management system a company uses to evaluate them (Gosslin, Werner, & Halle, 1997). These preferences may factor into job applicants’ level of attraction towards an organization they may be interested in working for (Blume, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2013; Gerhart & Milkovich, 1990; Wayne & Casper, 2012). This is important because not all employees respond well to all types of feedback. Previous research has found that some
individuals react poorly to social-comparative feedback (Feeney et al., 2016; Roch et al., 2007). Therefore, it would be to the benefit of researchers and practitioners alike to better understand of what characteristics dispose an individual to prefer social-comparative feedback. This knowledge may encourage organizations to implement and thereby benefit from the many advantages of social-comparative feedback including improved accuracy and criterion validity, as well as reduced leniency (Feeney, Goffin, Daljeet, Factor & Doyle, 2018; Freund & Kasten, 2012; Wagner & Goffin, 1997). Accordingly, the purpose of the second study in this program of research is to identify whether personality traits and other such individual differences are associated with a preference for social-comparative feedback. In doing so, it may allow researchers and practitioners to make targeted use of social-comparative performance ratings and increase their use by providing them to those who may be interested in receiving these types of ratings.
References


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Chapter 4

Individual Differences in Preferences for Relative Performance Ratings

Research has consistently shown that one of the best ways to improve the overall performance of an organization is through hiring strong performers (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; MacLane & Walmsley, 2010; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). However, in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to attract, hire, and retain high-performing employees (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2012). One way to facilitate the retention of high-performing employees is to recognize and reward their accomplishments via a well-designed performance management system (Trank, Rynes, Bretz, 2002). Moreover, researchers have found that the use of certain types of performance management systems, such as those that employ relative ratings, can contribute to the overall improvement of performance in the workplace through inciting lower-performing employees to voluntarily, or involuntarily, leave the company based on their performance ratings (Scullen, Bergey, & Aiman-Smith, 2005).

Broadly speaking, relative ratings, sometimes referred to as social-comparative ratings, are a type of performance rating that leverage social comparisons to facilitate the evaluation of employees (Olson, Goffin, & Haynes, 2007). In this type of rating system, an employee’s performance is compared to that of a carefully chosen reference group, or in some cases other specific employees (Goffin & Olson, 2011; Olson et al., 2007). Previous research shows that there may be advantages to adopting a performance management system based on social-comparative ratings including an improved ability to discriminate between employees, and a variety of psychometric advantages (Gorman, Meriac, Roch, Ray, & Gamble, 2017). Compared to traditional (i.e., absolute) rating systems, social-comparative rating systems are better at differentiating amongst the performance ratings of employees (Blume, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2013;
Goffin et al., 1996; Guralnik, Rosmarin, & So, 2004). There are many different methods of conducting social-comparative performance ratings but one of the most sophisticated social-comparative rating methods is the Relative Percentile Method (RPM; Catano, Weisner, & Hackett, 2019; Goffin et al., 1996). By design, the RPM discourages raters from assigning identical scores to ratees, limiting the likelihood that multiple employees will be assigned identical performance scores when their performance is not in fact equal (Goffin et al., 1996). As a result, it is easier for managers to identify top performers’ efforts. Social-comparative rating systems have demonstrated other advantages beyond traditional absolute rating systems (e.g., rating systems that use pre-determined standards for performance) include increased criterion related validity, accuracy, and rater agreement, as well as reduced leniency in single ratee and multi-source performance ratings (Feeney, Goffin, Daljeet, Factor & Doyle, 2017; Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016; Freund & Kasten, 2012; Goffin Gellatly, Paunonen, Jackson, & Meyer, 1996; Goffin et al., 2009; Mabe & West, 1982; Wagner & Goffin, 1997).

Researchers have found that job seekers pay attention to the various human-resource management features of an organization during the recruitment process, including how performance will be evaluated and how rewards will be distributed (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1990; Wayne & Casper, 2012). Employees, especially top performers, may seek out organizations that allow them to stand out as well as facilitate and reward their successful performance (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Cadsby, Song, & Tapon, 2007; Scullen et al., 2015; Turban & Keon, 1990). Moreover, employees demonstrate preferences for certain features of performance appraisal systems such as their purpose (i.e., developmental or administratively focused), degree of formality, and frequency (Gosslin, Werner, & Halle, 1997). There is also evidence suggesting individuals have preferences for different styles of performance rating scales (Blume, 2013).
Organizations might wish to take strategic advantage of these preferences to attract and ultimately retain top talent as a function of increased person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996). However, little is known about what kinds of individuals may be interested, or disinterested, in working for a company that uses social-comparative performance evaluations. Relatedly, approximately 83% of organizations use absolute performance ratings (Goreman et al., 2017). A direct corollary is that organizations implicitly assume that the majority of employees would benefit from and also prefer to receive absolute performance ratings. However, no extant research has examined this assumption and evaluated the potential consequences and correlates of employee preferences for either absolute or social-comparative performance evaluations. Specifically, if an organization were to advertise a position and it were known that this organization places an emphasis on rewarding top performers by using a social-comparative performance rating system, would this change the profile of the psychological characteristics of individuals who are attracted to the organization? Likewise, would this impact an applicant’s willingness to accept a potential job offer from such an organization? Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to identify whether some applicants demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance ratings over traditional absolute performance ratings when given a choice, and to identify key psychological characteristics of the individuals who may demonstrate such a preference.

Social comparisons are interpersonal comparisons made to evaluate oneself in comparison to others, or evaluate others relative to others (Festinger, 1954). According to social comparison theory, all humans engage in social comparisons in one form or another and do so to evaluate how individuals compare to one another on a wide range of behaviours, skills, attitudes, and more (Festinger, 1954; Goffin & Olson, 2011). Some researchers believe that the frequency
with which individuals make use of social comparisons may reflect an individual difference and preference for this type of information and feedback (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Across a series of studies, Gibbons and Buunk (1999) developed a measure of Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) to assess individual differences in preference for social comparisons. Buunk and Gibbons (2007) argue that individuals high on SCO prefer to make judgements based on social comparisons. Accordingly, we argue that individuals high on SCO should demonstrate a preference for social comparison-based information over non-social comparison information. In a workplace context, this might manifest as a preference for social-comparative performance ratings. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Individuals high on SCO should demonstrate a preference for social-comparative rating systems over absolute performance management systems, as doing so will increase their opportunity to receive social-comparative feedback.

Research has consistently shown that cognitive ability is the best predictor of individual job performance and that hiring individuals high on cognitive ability is one of the best ways to improve performance within an organization (MacLane & Walmsley, 2010; Schmit & Hunter, 1998; Schmidt, Ones, & Hunter, 1992). In workplace settings, individuals high on cognitive ability tend to prefer performance rating systems that reward and recognize individual performance (Trank, et al., 2002), and feature high reward differentiation from other employees (Blume, Baldwin, & Rubin, 2009), as these types of performance management systems allow those high in cognitive ability to maximize potential rewards. Consequently, Blume and colleagues (2013) found that individuals high in cognitive ability prefer forced-distribution performance management systems over traditional absolute performance management systems since forced-distribution rating systems, like other social-comparative performance rating systems,
systems, facilitate high reward differentiation. Accordingly, given that other well-designed social-comparative rating systems will also feature high reward differentiation, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2:** Individuals higher on cognitive ability will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems.

Personality has a long-standing history of being used to predict a variety of workplace behaviours (Furnham, 2002). Historically, research in personality has settled on a five-factor model (FFM) of personality (Digman, 1990). However, recent advancements have put forth compelling evidence that human personality is better represented by six broad traits in the form of the HEXACO model of personality (Lee & Ashton, 2004). In addition to variants of the traits from the FFM, the HEXACO model recognises Honesty-Humility as a sixth, core personality trait that often accounts for variance in important criterion beyond the FFM (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Importantly, the six HEXACO personality traits (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience) are comprised of four ‘narrow’ traits each that capture more specific aspects of human behaviour (Lee & Ashton, 2016). These narrow personality traits tend to be more useful for predicting behaviours due to their more specific definitions and less expansive content domains (Paunonen & Ashton, 2001).

Meta-analytic evidence has consistently demonstrated that Conscientiousness is the strongest personality predictor of cognitive ability as well as work-performance behaviours (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006; Hurtz & Donovan, 2002; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Consistent with the idea that high achievers and strong performers will prefer rating and reward systems that recognize and facilitate their individual success (Trank et al., 2002), we broadly expect those high on Conscientiousness to prefer social-comparative
rating and reward system. However, we argue that this effect may be driven by two of the narrow traits within Conscientiousness: Organization, and Diligence.

In the HEXACO model, the four narrow traits that form Conscientiousness are: Organization, Perfectionism, Prudence, and Diligence (Lee & Ashton, 2004; see Table 6 for definitions). Individual’s high in organization have a strong desire for order and structure. Moreover, those who have a high need for structure seek to understand the world by simplifying and processing complex information as efficiently as possible (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). This includes social as well as non-social information such as performance ratings and feedback.

Compared to absolute ratings and feedback, social-comparative ratings and feedback are arguably less cognitively complex and more cognitively efficient. It has been argued that social comparisons are such a necessary and pervasive part of everyday life that human’s proclivity for social comparisons may have become hard-wired as result of evolutionary processes (Goffin & Olson, 2011). Accordingly, our ability to make social comparisons may have been developed over generations to become a natural and efficient cognitive process for humans. Absolute ratings are cognitively inefficient as they do not provide the extra information about the performance of others that social-comparative ratings provide (Farh & Dobbins, 1989). For a ratee to obtain this information they must expend additional cognitive, and perhaps even social resources, to identify how they performed compared to others. On the other hand, social-comparative ratings package more complex information into a single rating making them more cognitively efficient as they provide the recipient with information about their own level of performance and that of others at the same time (Goffin et al., 2009; Goffin & Olson, 2011). Moreover, because it is easier to process social-comparative rating information, it may be the case that this type of rating information is easier to make use of and understand thereby
providing a more efficient pathway towards improving future performance. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Individuals high on Organization will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems.

One of the primary characteristics of individuals high on Diligence is their need for achievement (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Individuals characterized by a high Need for Achievement (i.e., Diligence) have a strong work ethic, enjoy hard work, are ambitious, and take their jobs seriously (Bluen, Barling, Burns, 1990). Individuals who are motivated by achievement also prefer merit-based rewards (Turben & Keon, 1993). Combined with their desire to succeed and work hard, a preference for merit-based rewards may enable a preference for social-comparative performance ratings as this type of evaluation and reward system will better facilitate individual success. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3b:** Individuals higher on Diligence will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems.

Broadly speaking, we expect personality will relate to individual’s preferences between the social-comparative and absolute performance rating systems. However, we do not have a priori predictions for how the five of the six core personality traits that comprise the HEXACO, broad or narrow, may be associated with these preferences. Accordingly, we ask the research question:

**RQ1:** Will the remaining broad personality traits that comprise the HEXACO (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness), and their narrow facets (See Table 6), be associated with a preference for social-comparative or absolute performance rating systems?
Those high in Self-Efficacy may also demonstrate a preference for social-comparative rating systems. Individuals with high levels of Self-Efficacy are said to be confident in their cognitive skills, as well as other abilities to succeed in a given situation (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Previous research has found that Self-Efficacy is positively related to performance across a variety of domains, including that of job performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). However, it has also been found that those high in self-efficacy tend to over-estimate their performance abilities relative to their actual performance (Stone, 1994). Consequently, this may facilitate high Self-Efficacy individuals to believe that they will be strong performers, regardless of their actual levels of performance. In accordance with Trank et al. (2002), strong performers, or in this case, those who believe they will be strong performers, should demonstrate a preference for a rating and reward system that is best able to differentiate amongst, and reward strong performers. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 4:** Individuals high in Self-Efficacy will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems.

Similarly, individuals high on Narcissism have an inflated sense of self, frequently engage in ego-promoting behaviours, and are entitled (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Individuals high on Narcissism may incorrectly believe they are better performers than they really are due to an inflated sense of self. Consequently, they may expect to be rewarded as though they are high performers and expect that social-comparative ratings and feedback they receive will be ego-enhancing, making this type of feedback more desirable to them. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5:** Individuals high on Narcissism will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems.
Recently, researchers have begun to adopt a person-centered approach to personality in order to supplement existing variable-centered research (e.g., Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorf, & van Aken, 2001; Daljeet, Bremner, Giammarco, Meyer, & Paunonen, 2017; Espinoza, Daljeet & Meyer, 2020; Herzberg & Roth, 2006). That is, researchers have begun to relax the assumption that the relationship between personality traits and various outcome are the same for all individuals across a population, and recognize that homogeneous subgroups exist within a population. The implications of this are that the relations among personality traits may differ across groups (Daljeet et al., 2017; Espinoza, Daljeet, & Meyer, 2020). Two recent studies present evidence that five subgroups, or profiles as they are often called, exist in the HEXACO space for the general population (Daljeet et al., 2017; Espinoza, 2020). The five profiles in this body of research are thought to reflect on some level, the continuum of agency-communion within the context of the HEXACO. That is, the way in which the HEXACO traits configure themselves within each profile appears to reflect a focus on either task-based functioning, or altruistic-social functioning (Espinoza et al., 2020). The five profiles found in this work have been labelled according to the degree to which they are perceived to reflect the agency-communion continuum: the Achievement-oriented agentic profile, the Ego-oriented agentic profile, the Insecure profile, the Communal profile, and the Socially adjusted profile (See Figure 1).

However, beyond their configuration and evidence of their stability, very little is currently known about these profiles and the affective, behavioural, or cognitive characteristics of people associated with them. Previously, we argued that high levels of certain individual differences may relate to a preference for social comparison-based rating and reward systems. These predictions, however, stemmed from a variable-centered approach and only address how a
single trait in isolation may relate to the outcome. Taking a person-centered approach allows us
to move beyond two and three-way interaction effects to examine how various combinations of
all six personality traits may relate to preferences for either performance rating system.
Accordingly, we speculate that being probabilistically associated with a given personality profile
may differentially relate to one’s preference for either a social-comparative or absolute rating
and reward system. Accordingly, we aim to identify whether certain profiles, or personality
types, demonstrate a preference for social-comparative or absolute ratings. Doing so may help
facilitate selection procedures or may even be useful for managers to know when deciding how
to evaluate their employees. We speculate that profiles that may have a strong Conscientiousness
and achievement focus (the Achievement-oriented agentic, and Socially Adjusted profiles) might
be more likely to indicate a preference for social-comparative ratings. Likewise, we suspect
profiles that reflect a high regard for oneself (the Ego-oriented agentic profile) may also be more
likely to demonstrate a preference for social-comparative feedback. Lastly, profiles that may be
associated with, or reflect, a high degree of risk aversion or anxiety (the Insecure and Communal
profiles) may prefer the more commonplace absolute reward and rating system. Since these
associations are speculative in nature, we ask the exploratory research question:

RQ2: Do the five personality profiles identified by Espinoza et al (2020) differentially
relate to one’s preference for either social-comparative or absolute performance ratings?

Methods

Participants

In total, 867 participants were recruited for this study online through Amazon’s online
survey and data collection system, Mechanical Turk (MTurk). To qualify for this study,
participants had to be employed, either part-time or full time. After removing careless responders
who failed to correctly respond to the direct response questions (n = 147), those who
subsequently indicated we should not use their data (n = 5) and those who failed to answer content questions correctly (n = 570), 145 participants remained. Additional details about the careless responding and content questions can be found in the materials section. Participant age ranged from 21 to 66 (M = 40.00, SD = 10.56). All were employed (85% full-time) and most reported identifying as female (66%). Additionally, 75% indicated they have worked in a supervisory role, 78% indicated that they have provided another employee with feedback on their job performance, and 94% of participants have had their performance evaluated formally. All participants were compensated for their time and responded to all items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) unless otherwise specified.

Materials

Preferences for Performance Feedback. Aguinis and Bradley (2014) recommends the use of vignettes to study phenomena that would be unethical or impossible to manipulate or study in real world situations. Therefore, to capture participants’ preferences for performance feedback, they were presented with a vignette and asked to respond to a single question pertaining to its content. The vignette first provides participants with a job description for a retail sales manager, and a list of important skills and tasks that typical of an individual employed in this roll (See Appendix I). Next, participants are asked to imagine they are searching for a job as a retail sales manager and have completed a final round of interviews for two very similar jobs at different companies they are interested in and qualified for. They are informed that although the two companies are similar in most regards (e.g., both are very large companies in the same industry), the two companies use very different systems to evaluate and reward their employees (social-comparative versus absolute). Participants were then presented with a chart explaining the two evaluation and reward systems, as well as sample ratings from each system (See
Appendix J. Last, participants were told to consider all the information they were presented with and were asked “Which company would you accept an offer of employment from?” and to respond using a four-point scale with option ranging from 1 (*Strongly prefer to work for the company that uses the relative rating system*) to 4 (*Strongly prefer to work for the company that uses the absolute rating system*).

**Cognitive Ability.** Next, participants were asked to complete a timed, 23-item, self-report version of the International Cognitive Ability Resource (ICAR; Condon & Revelle, 2014) in order to measure cognitive ability. This measure of cognitive ability contains four item types: Verbal Reasoning items (9-items), Letter and Number Series items (6-items), Matrix Reasoning items (4-items), and Three-dimensional Rotation items (4-items). See Appendix K for example items. The authors of the measure reported the internal consistency reliability across all four subscales to be .81 and also provided evidence of its validity (Condon & Revelle, 2014).

Participants were given six minutes to answers these questions, which is commensurate with the amount of time provided for other well-established cognitive ability tests (McKelvie, 1994; Wright & Laing, 1943).

**Social Comparison Orientation.** Participants completed a modified 6-item version of the ability subscale from the social comparison orientation scale (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The items from the ability subscale were modified to fit the context of our study and were rewritten to reference social comparisons in the workplace. For example, a sample item reads: “I often compare how I am performing at work to the performance of my co-workers” (See Appendix L for the remaining items) The internal consistency reliability for the original scale was between .77 and .85. In addition, the authors provide evidence of the original measure’s validity (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999)
**Personality.** Participants completed the 100-item, self-report version of the HEXACO personality inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2016), the 8-item General Self Efficacy Scale (Chen et al., 2001), and the 9-item Narcissism subscale from the Short Dark Triad scale (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The HEXACO uses six, 16-item subscales to measure Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotionality, and Honesty-Humility and 4-item subscales to measure each of the narrow traits. The authors of the HEXACO report that the internal consistency reliability for each subscale is between .59 and .89 and provide evidence in support of the measure’s validity (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Lee & Ashton, 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2016). Similarly, the internal consistency reliability for the General Self-Efficacy scale is between .86 and .90 and evidence has been provided in support of the measure’s validity (Chen et al., 2001). Lastly, internal consistency of the Narcissism subscale from the SD3 ranges from .68 to .78 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The authors also provided evidence in support for the measure’s validity.

**Careless Responding.** Careless responders were identified using best practice recommendations (Meade & Craig, 2012). Participants were asked to complete five directed-response items (e.g., “Please respond strongly disagree to this item”) embedded throughout the questionnaire portion of the study. Additionally, at the end of the study and before participants were debriefed, participants were asked to respond “yes” or “no” to the question “In your honest opinion, should we use your data in our analyses in this study?”. Participants who responded “no” to this question, and participants who incorrectly answered any of the aforementioned directed-response items were removed from all analyses.

**Content Questions.** As part of identifying careless responders, we also asked participants to answer four content question to ensure only participants who read the study
materials and paid sufficient attention were included in our analyses. Participants were asked “In the job description you were provided with, which was listed as an important skill?”, “What type of job were you told to imagine you were looking for?”, “Which of the following was a key feature of the Relative Rating System?”, and lastly “Which of the following was a key feature of the Absolute Rating System?”. See Appendix M for additional details. Participants who incorrectly answered any of these questions were removed from our analyses, additional details are provided in the Participants section above.

Procedure

Participants were recruited online. They read a description of the study which explained that they would be participating in a survey about preferences for workplace feedback where they would be asked to take on the role of a Retail Sales Manager who is looking for a job. Next participants were provided with a job description for a Retail Sales Manager and were told to imagine they had been presented with job offers from two very similar companies after completing a series of interviews. Next, participants were told they would need to review the two different methods these companies used to evaluate the performance of their employees and subsequently indicate which company they would prefer to work for. They were told that one company used a social-comparative performance management system and that the other company used an absolute performance management system. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two versions of the vignette. The first version presented information about the company that used a social-comparative performance system first, whereas the second version presented information about the company that used an absolute performance management system first. This was done to limit potential order effects. After reading the vignette and responding to it, participants were given six minutes to complete the ICAR cognitive ability test, followed by
content questions about the vignette they read. Next, participants completed the measures of personality, and social comparison orientation, presented in a randomized order and without a time limit. Last, participants were asked the remaining questions used to help further mitigate against careless responding.

**Results**

**Manipulation Check**

First, we evaluated whether the order participants read about the different reward systems impacted which reward system they preferred. No significant difference was found between the recoded means of the response to the vignette from the two different orders of presentation $t(126) = -0.99, p = .32$. Therefore, we found no evidence that the order materials were presented in impacted which reward system participants preferred ($M_1 = 2.54, SD_1 = 1.20; M_2 = 2.73, SD_2 = 1.09$).

**Main Findings**

Means, SDs, correlations, and Cronbach’s alphas for the main variables are reported in Table 7. Before testing our hypotheses, we evaluated what proportion of participants indicated a preference for absolute and social-comparative performance evaluations. We found that the majority of participants (54%, $n = 79$) either ‘slightly preferred’ ($n = 33$) or ‘strongly preferred’ ($n = 46$) absolute feedback whereas only 46% ($n = 66$) of participants either ‘slightly preferred’ ($n = 31$) or ‘strongly preferred’ ($n = 35$) the social-comparative feedback. Notably, we identified that, on average, participants selected the more extreme preference option (strongly preferred) more frequently than the less extreme preference option (slightly preferred).

Although we provided participants with four response options, we did so to be able to report on the strength of the preference for absolute or social-comparative performance ratings. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, we elected to use a dichotomized version
of this variable in all analyses in the present study pertaining to participants’ preferences for performance feedback.

**Dichotomized Preference for Feedback.** Although there are statistical concerns with the practice of dichotomizing a true continuous variable (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002), it is acceptable practice to treat a variable as dichotomous when a binary topology theoretically underlies what is being measured (DeCoster, Iselin, & Gallucci, 2009; MacCallum et al., 2002; Iacobucci et al., 2015). Although we collected participants’ responses to the vignettes using a 4-point scale, we argue that participants’ responses to the vignettes ultimately reflect a binary choice: would participants prefer a social-comparative or absolute performance management system. Moreover, the four response options do not reflect a true continuum, nor are they scaled in a true continuous fashion. That is, a preference for absolute and social-comparative performance ratings are not opposites such that they should be conceptualized as opposite poles on a continuum. Accordingly, we elected to dichotomize their responses to the vignettes to reflect the fundamental, and real-world decision participants would have been faced with had they found themselves in the situation outlined in the vignette. Participants who indicated that they ‘slightly preferred’ or ‘strongly preferred’ the social-comparative rating system were assigned a score of 0, and those who ‘slightly preferred’ or ‘strongly preferred’ the absolute rating system were given a score of 1.

**Hypothesis Testing.** Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals with greater levels of SCO would prefer the social-comparative rating system. The mean level of SCO for individuals who preferred the social-comparative rating system \( (M = 3.48, SD = 0.49) \), was higher than those who preferred the absolute rating system \( (M = 3.22, SD = 0.61) \), and the difference was statistically
significant, \( t[142] = 2.89, p = .004 \). Furthermore, effect size was moderate, \( d = 0.47 \). Therefore Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that individuals with greater levels of cognitive ability would prefer the social-comparative rating system. The mean level of cognitive ability did not significantly differ across those who preferred the social-comparative rating system (\( M = 0.41, SD = 0.15 \)) and those who preferred the absolute rating system (\( M = 0.44, SD = 0.14 \)), \( t[133] = -1.39, p = 0.17 \). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3a predicted that individuals high on organization will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems, and Hypothesis 3b maintained that individuals higher on Diligence will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems over absolute performance rating systems. To test these hypotheses, the four narrow traits that comprise Conscientiousness were entered into a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as dependent variables. A significant effect was found for Conscientiousness overall (Wilk’s \( \Lambda \) = .88, \( F(4, 140) = 4.72, p = .001 \); \( \eta^2 = .12 \)) and additional univariate testing revealed significant effects for the Organization \( (F(1,143) = 9.16, p = .003, d = 0.51) \), and Diligence \( (F(1,143) = 4.42, p = 0.04, d = 0.35) \) subscales, but not Perfectionism \( (F(1,143) = 0.47, p = .49) \) and Prudence \( (F(1,143) = 0.27, p = 0.61) \). Therefore, Hypothesis 3a and 3b were supported.

Next, we conducted exploratory analyses to address whether the remaining personality traits that comprise the HEXACO (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness), as well as their narrow facets, might be associated with a preference for social-comparative or absolute performance rating systems. To evaluate this research question, we conducted five separate MANOVAs, on the remaining HEXACO
dimensions and used the narrow traits as the dependent variables. Consistent with previous research, the Altruism interstitial facet was not analyzed as part of Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, and Emotionality subscales (Thielmann et al., 2020). None of the MANOVAs for Honesty-Humility (Wilk’s Λ = .98, $F(4, 140) = 0.68$, $p = .60$), Emotionality (Wilk’s Λ = .95, $F(4, 140) = 1.87$, $p = .11$), Extraversion (Wilk’s Λ = .98, $F(4, 140) = 0.69$, $p = .60$), Agreeableness (Wilk’s Λ = .97, $F(4, 140) = 1.22$, $p = .31$), or Openness to Experience (Wilk’s Λ = .96, $F(4, 140) = 1.42$, $p = .23$) were significant. Although the MANOVA for Openness to Experience was significant, the correlation between Openness to Experience and preference for feedback was significant ($r = -.17$, $p = 0.04$). This finding should be interpreted with caution as it is inconsistent with the results of the MANOVA. The apparent difference will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion section below.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that individuals high in Self-Efficacy would prefer the social-comparative rating system. The mean level of Self-Efficacy for individuals who preferred the social-comparative rating system ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.65$), was not significantly different from those who preferred the absolute rating system ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.72$), $t[142] = 1.53$, $p = .13$. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that individuals with greater levels of narcissism would prefer the social-comparative rating system. Hypothesis 5 was not supported, as there was no significant differences in narcissism across those who preferred the social-comparative ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.75$) or, the absolute ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.73$) rating systems, $t(137) = 1.53$, $p = .30$.

**Research Question.** Another research question we explored was whether the five personality profiles differentially were associated with a preference for social-comparative or absolute rating systems. We used predetermined start values derived from work done with large
samples of HEXACO data to impose the structure of the previously identified five-profiles onto the HEXACO data (see Espinoza et al., 2020 for additional details). Subsequently, we conducted auxiliary variable analyses using the Wald chi-square test of statistical significance in Mplus 7 to examine mean differences in dichotomized responses to preference for either social-comparative or absolute performance rating systems across the five profiles (see Table 8). The Wald’s chi-squared test for the equality of means was not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.042, p = .40$). Therefore, the mean preference for social-comparative or absolute rating systems did not differ across the five profiles.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the present study was to identify whether job applicants might demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance ratings over traditional absolute performance ratings when given a choice. As a corollary of this, we also sought to identify whether any key psychological characteristics and individual differences were associated with having a preference between the two performance rating systems. The results of the study provide empirical evidence that some individuals may hold preferences for social-comparative performance evaluations over traditional, absolute performance evaluations. In the current sample, nearly half of the participants expressed such a preference. Moreover, support was found for the notion that certain individual differences are associated with having a preference for either social-comparative or absolute performance ratings.

Although not explicitly hypothesized, one of the most important and interesting findings produced in this study is that when given a choice, some participants will demonstrate a preference for social-comparative performance evaluations over absolute performance evaluations. This is important because most organizations exclusively use absolute performance
evaluations (Goreman et al., 2017) and implicitly assume that all of their employees will want, and benefit from receiving, performance evaluations in this format. The results of this study provide the first empirical evidence that individuals may would in fact prefer social-comparative performance evaluations over absolute evaluations. This opens the doors for future researchers to thoroughly investigate the important related question of why they might prefer social-comparative performance evaluations. As discussed in greater detail below, one possible antecedent for this preference is individual differences in personality.

As predicted, we found that individuals with higher levels of SCO indicated a preference for social-comparative performance rating systems. This finding is theoretically consistent with our arguments as well as those made by Gibbons and Bunk (1999), who held that individuals high on SCO have a proclivity for social-comparative ratings because these ratings are derived from social-comparative information. One implication of this finding is that it may help facilitate the development of specific feedback for employees. Individuals differ in their reaction to performance ratings and feedback (Keeping & Levy, 2000) and knowing in advance how to frame or present an individual’s performance ratings and feedback may facilitate the acceptance of, and/or use of the feedback by the employee. That is, if an HR manager is aware that an employee is particularly interested in receiving a certain type of feedback, the employee may be more receptive to the feedback if it is presented in a format or style that they are receptive to. In the future, researchers may wish to explore the affective, behavioral, and cognitive consequences of providing employees with the same feedback using different rating formats (i.e., relative, or absolute). Importantly, this finding also demonstrates that individual differences may play a role in determining people’s preferences for social-comparative or absolute rating systems.
On the other hand, no support was found for the notion that individuals with higher levels of cognitive ability would prefer the social-comparative rating system. This was unexpected as extant empirical research and theory both suggest there should in fact be a relationship between cognitive ability and preference for social-comparative rating systems. A study by Blume et al. (2013) found that cognitive ability was associated with being attracted to an organization that used forced-distribution ratings, a type of social-comparative rating. This is supported by the argument advanced by Trank et al. (2002) that strong performers tend to have an interest in comparative performance. One possible explanation is that the type of social-comparative rating used in the present study differs rather substantially from the type of social-comparative ratings used by Blume et al. (2013). Researchers have noted that the various social-comparative rating formats are not all the same and can differ from one another in important ways (Rosch et al., 2007). That is, it may be the case that the social-comparative rating format used in the study by Blume et al. (2013) differs in important ways from the social-comparative rating format used in the present study (the RPM). For example, the RPM involves comparing a ratee to predetermined and relevant referent group whereas other social-comparative methods such as the ranked comparison or forced distribution methods involve direct comparisons of individuals to other individuals. It is possible that such differences across the various social comparison-based methods may have contributed to limiting the generalizability of previous findings.

In support of Hypothesis 3a and 3b a large multivariate effect was found for Conscientiousness as a whole with respect to preference for feedback, and the two narrow traits responsible for this effect were Organization and Diligence. The finding that individuals with a high need for structure and order (Organization) prefer social-comparative feedback is consistent with the arguments made by Neuberg and Newsom (1993) asserting that these types of
individuals aim to process information as efficiently as possible. Compared to traditional absolute ratings, social comparative performance ratings communicate more information, in a condensed fashion making which is why they may appeal to individuals high on organization. Moreover, humans are very accustomed to interpreting and making use of social comparative information as social comparisons are used throughout everyday life to help understand how an individual measures up in comparison to others (Goffin & Olson, 2011). Accordingly, it may be the case that in the context of the workplace those high on organization prefer a social comparative rating system as it provides them with information that they are practiced at interpreting and implementing to help facilitate efforts to improve their work performance.

The finding that individuals high on Diligence prefer social comparative rating systems suggests that an individual’s drive to work hard and succeed facilitates a preference for social comparative ratings. This is consistent with previous research that has found achievement-oriented individuals prefer merit-based rewards (Turban & Keon, 1990), which a social comparative rating system would facilitate as they feature high reward differentiation (Goffin et al., 1996).

Although the findings that individuals higher on Organization and Diligence are important on their own, the overall effect of Conscientiousness is also theoretically meaningful. As mentioned, meta-analytic evidence suggests that those high in Conscientiousness overall tend to be strong employees (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006; Hurtz & Donovan, 2002; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). In this study, individuals high on Conscientiousness indicated a preference for a social-comparative rating system. This finding is consistent with Trank et al. (2002) and their argument that strong performers are likely to be interested in comparative performance. Moreover, this finding is also consistent with Moon,
Scullen, and Latham’s (2017) theory that introducing social-comparative ratings to an organization may induce a sorting effect. A sorting effect is the simultaneous process of organizational attraction and attrition due to a change in an element of organizational design. More specifically, a change in organizational design that results in higher performers being attracted to an organization while simultaneously motivating low performers to exit the organization (Cadsby et al., 2007; Gerhart & Fang, 2014). A well-documented example of this is pay-for-performance. There is evidence that when an organization implements pay-for-performance it may induce a sorting effect. Consequently, strong performers will enter the organization while poor performers may exit the organization specifically due to this change (Cadsby, et al., 2007; Gerhart & Fang, 2014; Trevor, Reilly, & Gerhart, 2012). Accordingly, the results of the present study suggest that if an organization were to introduce social-comparative ratings into its human resources and management systems (e.g., recruitment and selection), strong performers may be more attracted to the organization as individuals with higher levels of Conscientiousness are more likely to demonstrate a preference for social-comparative ratings. To clarify the extent to which social-comparative ratings induce a sorting effect, future researchers should investigate whether introducing social-comparative ratings to an organization results in the retention of strong performers and the attrition of poor performers.

Although we only made specific a priori predictions for how Conscientiousness and its components might facilitate a preference for social-comparative ratings, it was the sole core dimension of personality associated with such a preference. The results of our exploratory analyses did not reveal significant multivariate effects for any of the other five core dimensions of personality. Although no significant multivariate effect was found for Openness to Experience, there was a significant negative correlation between Openness to Experience and
preference for feedback, which suggests that greater Openness to Experience is associated with a preference for social-comparative feedback. This finding differs from the results of the MANOVA, which found no effect for Openness to Experience. One possible explanation for why this may have occurred is that there were insufficient degrees of freedom for the MANOVA to achieve the power needed to detect an effect. Accordingly, this finding should be interpreted with caution and should be revisited in future research on this topic to clarify what potential relationship there may be between this Openness to Experience, its components, and having a preference for different types of feedback.

Similarly, no evidence was found to support the notion that individuals with higher levels of Self-Efficacy would demonstrate a greater preference for social-comparative ratings, therefore Hypothesis 4 was not supported. One potential explanation relates to the way in which Self-Efficacy was measured. Our hypothesis was predicated on the notion that individuals high in Self-Efficacy may accurately or inaccurately believe that they are stronger performers (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Stone, 1994). Previous empirical research has argued that Self-Efficacy is domain specific (Judge et al., 2007). In our study we used the broad, domain-nonspecific measure of General Self-Efficacy (Chen, 2001). Accordingly, the measure may have been too broad and insufficiently specific in referencing the performance-related behaviours relevant to the target job identified in the vignettes used in the present study. Future researchers who are interested in revisiting this relationship may be better served in using a modified, or more domain-specific measure of Self-Efficacy that covers more job-specific performance domains.

Likewise, no support was found for Hypothesis 5, which predicted that individuals high on Narcissism would indicate a preference for social-comparative ratings. As was the case with
Self-Efficacy, the measure used to assess Narcissism may have been too broad. Researchers have criticized the Short Dark Triad scale for being overly broad (Maples, Lamkin & Miller, 2014), and that although omnibus measures of the Dark Triad are good for studying Narcissism in general, they sometimes fall short when studying how a trait may predict specific behaviours (Maples et al., 2014; Miller, Vise, Crowe, & Lynam, 2019). Accordingly, future researchers looking to reevaluate this relationship might wish to consider using a multidimensional measure of Narcissism.

Lastly, our exploratory analyses pertaining to personality profiles found no association between any of the five personality profiles and preferences for either type of performance rating system. The variable-centered analyses from this study provides evidence that certain aspects of personality facilitate a preference for social-comparative ratings. In conjunction with the available evidence in the literature we expected the profiles characterized by certain personality traits to facilitate a preference for either performance rating systems.

One reason this may not have worked out is that the five personality profiles are all derived from broad traits. As was the case in our own study, the majority of our findings regarding personality pertain to narrow traits. Although broad traits are useful for studying general patterns of behaviour, narrow and more specific traits are typically more useful for predicting specific and more context-specific behaviours (Ashton, 1998; Hastings & O’Neill, 2009; Paunonen, 1993; Ashton, Jackson, Paunonen, Helmes, & Rothstein, 1995). Accordingly, one explanation for why a relationship was not found between any of the five personality profiles and a preference for any type of performance ratings is that personality profiles are too broad in scope.
A second factor that may have contributed to the lack of significant findings associated with the person-centered results may have been the small sample size used in this study. Although we had enough participants to successfully execute LPA using pre-determined start values, it is possible that people were unevenly distributed across the five profiles identified in our data. That is, it is possible that only a small number of people were assigned to one or more of the five classes we imposed on our data. Consequently, this may have limited the power of some of the post-hoc mean difference tests that were conducted as follow-up analyses to the profile analyses themselves.

Although not all our hypotheses pertaining to individual differences and preferences for certain types of performance ratings were supported, the findings that were supported may be of practical, and strategic interest to organizations. Our results supported the hypotheses that individuals higher on SCO and two of the narrow traits that comprise Conscientiousness (Organization and Diligence) would prefer social-comparative ratings to traditional absolute performance ratings. These findings have practical implications for organizations that either already use social-comparative performance ratings or are looking to implement them. That is, organizations can take strategic advantage of this information and improve the way in which their recruitment and selection systems are designed as a function of person-organization fit. Previous research has found that when employees experience poor person-organization fit they are more likely to experience low levels of organizational commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Hersccovich, & Topolyntsky, 2002) and subsequently engage in turnover (Judge, 1994). However, when job applicants are given extensive and realistic information about a job or organization in advance of being hired they are less likely to engage in turnover (Bretz & Judge, 1998). To take advantage of this, organizations that make use of social-comparative ratings
should consider targeting individuals high on SCO during recruitment and selection processes. This in turn may improve person-organization fit for those who enter the organization and may reduce their long-term intentions to turnover. Another way organizations using social-comparative ratings can take advantage of these findings is to continue to select for individuals high on Conscientiousness. As discussed in the context of the findings relating to Conscientiousness and its facets, organizations that use social-comparative ratings may be able to attract stronger performers to the organization as individuals high on Conscientiousness (i.e., those who would also be high on Diligence and Organization) not only prefer social-comparative ratings, but also tend to be strong performers at work (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Therefore, by using social-comparative ratings within an organization it is possible to improve overall organizational performance as stronger performing employees may be more attracted to and subsequently more inclined to enter the organization.

Limitations

As is the case with all studies, our research is not without its limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The primary limitation of this study was our use of vignettes as their generalizability is limited (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). In developing our study, we followed best practices in our design and use of vignettes. According to Aguinis and Bradley (2014) the use of vignettes is ideal for studies where it would be unethical or impractical to manipulate certain elements of a situation. For example, what type of performance rating system a prospective employer uses. Future researchers interested in evaluating and building upon the generalizability this work should consider moving beyond vignettes and conduct a field-test of the present study using a simulated or actual recruitment scenario. However, the results of lab and field studies typically converge (Andersen, Lindsay, & Bushman, 1999). Similarly, in the
vignettes from the present study, we asked participants to imagine as though they were looking for jobs as retail sales managers. Consequently, due to our use of vignettes we were unable to examine how our findings may have generalized across industries or job types. Accordingly, another future direction that researchers may wish to explore is whether or not the findings from the present study generalize across industries and job types.

Conclusion

Although not all our hypotheses pertaining to individual differences and preferences for certain types of performance ratings were supported, the findings that were supported may be of practical and strategic interest to organizations. Recall that evidence was found supporting the hypotheses predicting that individuals higher on SCO and Conscientiousness prefer social-comparative ratings to traditional absolute performance ratings. These findings have important practical implications for organizations that either already use social-comparative performance ratings or are looking to implement them. That is, organizations can take strategic advantage of this information and improve the way in which their recruitment and selection systems are designed as a function of person-organization fit. Additionally, these findings can be leveraged to possibly facilitate greater feedback acceptance and implementation of feedback by providing employees with the type of feedback that they want to receive. Previous research has found that when employees experience poor person-organization fit they are more likely to experience low levels of organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002) and subsequently engage in turnover (Judge, 1994). However, when job applicants are given extensive and realistic information about a job or organization in advance of being hired, they are less likely to engage in turnover (Bretz & Judge, 1998). In order to take advantage of this, organizations that make use of social-comparative ratings should consider targeting individuals high on SCO in their recruitment and
selection processes. This in turn may improve person-organization fit for those who ultimately enter the organization and may reduce their long-term intentions to turnover.

Similarly, another way organizations using social-comparative ratings can take advantage of these findings is to continue to select for individuals high on Conscientiousness. As discussed in the context of the findings relating to Conscientiousness and its facets, organizations that make use of social-comparative ratings may be able to attract stronger performers to the organization as individuals high on Conscientiousness not only prefer social-comparative ratings, but also tend to be strong performers at work (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Therefore, by using social-comparative ratings within an organization, it is possible to improve overall organizational performance as stronger performing employees may be more attracted to and subsequently more inclined to enter the organization. Furthermore, one of our primary arguments in this study is that strong performers will prefer social-comparative ratings. Future researchers may wish to explore whether those high on other dimensions of work performance such as organizational citizenship behaviours and low on counterproductive work behaviours (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002) may also demonstrate a preference for social-comparative ratings.

In conclusion, the study presents evidence that individual differences may indeed play a role in people’s preferences for different types of performance rating systems. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications that should be considered when designing organizational recruitment, and selection systems.
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Table 6. Description of Narrow-order HEXACO facets from Lee & Ashton 2004 and Lee & Ashton, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honesty-Humility Domain</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincerity</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to be genuine in interpersonal relations. Low scorers will flatter others or pretend to like them in order to obtain favors, whereas high scorers are unwilling to manipulate others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to avoid fraud and corruption. Low scorers are willing to gain by cheating or stealing, whereas high scorers are unwilling to take advantage of other individuals or of society at large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed Avoidance</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to be uninterested in possessing lavish wealth, luxury goods, and signs of high social status. Low scorers want to enjoy and to display wealth and privilege, whereas high scorers are not especially motivated by monetary or social-status considerations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to be modest and unassuming. Low scorers consider themselves as superior and as entitled to privileges that others do not have, whereas high scorers view themselves as ordinary people without any claim to special treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotionality Domain</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearfulness</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to experience fear. Low scorers feel little fear of injury and are relatively tough, brave, and insensitive to physical pain, whereas high scorers are strongly inclined to avoid physical harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to worry in a variety of contexts. Low scorers feel little stress in response to difficulties, whereas high scorers tend to become preoccupied even by relatively minor problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>Assesses one’s need for emotional support from others. Low scorers feel self-assured and able to deal with problems without any help or advice, whereas high scorers want to share their difficulties with those who will provide encouragement and comfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentimentality</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to feel strong emotional bonds with others. Low scorers feel little emotion when saying good-bye or in reaction to the concerns of others, whereas high scorers feel strong emotional attachments and an empathic sensitivity to the feelings of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extraversion Domain</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to have a positive self-regard, particularly in social contexts. High scorers are generally satisfied with themselves and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
consider themselves to have likable qualities, whereas low scorers tend to have a sense of personal worthlessness and see themselves as unpopular.

**Social Boldness**
Assesses one’s comfort or confidence within a variety of social situations. Low scorers feel shy or awkward in positions of leadership or when speaking in public, whereas high scorers are willing to approach strangers and are willing to speak up within group settings.

**Sociability**
Assesses a tendency to enjoy conversation, social interaction, and parties. Low scorers generally prefer solitary activities and do not seek out conversation, whereas high scorers enjoy talking, visiting, and celebrating with others.

**Liveliness**
Assesses one’s typical enthusiasm and energy. Low scorers tend not to feel especially cheerful or dynamic, whereas high scorers usually experience a sense of optimism and high spirits.

**Agreeableness Domain**

**Forgiveness**
Assesses one’s willingness to feel trust and liking toward those who may have caused one harm. Low scorers tend “hold a grudge” against those who have offended them, whereas high scorers are usually ready to trust others again and to re-establish friendly relations after having been treated badly.

**Gentleness**
Assesses a tendency to be mild and lenient in dealings with other people. Low scorers tend to be critical in their evaluations of others, whereas high scorers are reluctant to judge others harshly.

**Flexibility**
Assesses one’s willingness to compromise and cooperate with others. Low scorers are seen as stubborn and are willing to argue, whereas high scorers avoid arguments and accommodate others’ suggestions, even when these may be unreasonable.

**Patience**
Assesses a tendency to remain calm rather than to become angry. Low scorers tend to lose their tempers quickly, whereas high scorers have a high threshold for feeling or expressing anger.

**Conscientiousness Domain**

**Organization**
Assesses a tendency to seek order, particularly in one’s physical surroundings. Low scorers tend to be sloppy and haphazard, whereas high scorers keep things tidy and prefer a structured approach to tasks.

**Diligence**
Assesses a tendency to work hard. Low scorers have little self-discipline and are not strongly motivated to achieve, whereas high scorers have a strong “work ethic” and are willing to exert themselves.
Perfectionism Assesses a tendency to be thorough and concerned with details. Low scorers tolerate some errors in their work and tend to neglect details, whereas high scorers check carefully for mistakes and potential improvements.

Prudence Assesses a tendency to deliberate carefully and to inhibit impulses. Low scorers act on impulse and tend not to consider consequences, whereas high scorers consider their options carefully and tend to be cautious and self-controlled.

### Openness to Experience Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Appreciation</td>
<td>Assesses one’s enjoyment of beauty in art and in nature. Low Appreciation scorers tend not to become absorbed in works of art or in natural wonders, whereas high scorers have a strong appreciation of various art forms and of natural beauty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquisitiveness</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to seek information about, and experience with, the natural and human world. Low scorers have little curiosity about the natural or social sciences, whereas high scorers read widely and are interested in travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Assesses one’s preference for innovation and experiment. Low scorers have little inclination for original thought, whereas high scorers actively seek new solutions to problems and express themselves in art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconventionality</td>
<td>Assesses a tendency to accept the unusual. Low scorers avoid eccentric or nonconforming persons, whereas high scorers are receptive to ideas that might seem strange or radical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Narrow trait descriptions of the 24 narrow traits from the HEXACO model of personality (Lee & Ashton, 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2009).
### Table 7. Correlation matrix of study 2 variables.

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<th></th>
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<th>Abs/Rel</th>
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<th>C.Ability</th>
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## Individual Differences and Social-Comparative Feedback

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*p < .05, **p < .01.
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<td>(.72)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cprud</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>(.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oaes</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>(.67)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oinqu</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>(.59)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ounco</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocrea</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities are in the parentheses along the diagonals. Abs/Rel = Preference for Absolute (1) or Relative (0) feedback; SCO = Social Comparison Orientation; CAbility = Cognitive Ability; SelfEff = Self-Efficacy; Narc = Narcissism; H = Honesty-Humility; EM = Emotional Stability; X = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; O = Openness to Experience; Hmode = Modesty; Hgree = Greed Avoidance; Hsinc = Sincerity; Hfair = Fairness; Efavor = Fearfulness; Eanxi = Anxiety; Edepe = Dependence; Esent = Sentimentality; Xsses = Social Self-Esteem; Xsoci = Sociability; Xlive = Liveliness; Aforg = Forgiveness; Agent = Gentleness; Aflex = Flexibility; Apati = Patience; Corg = Organization; Cdil = Diligence; Cperf = Perfectionism; Cprud = Prudence; Oaes = Aesthetic Appreciation; Oinqu = Inquisitiveness; Ounco = Unconventionality; Ocrea = Creativity.

*p < .05, **p < .01.
Table 8. Results of the Wald test for the equality of means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Comparison Profile</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>.564</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.847</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>.798</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Overall test* 4.04 .400

*Note.* Profile 1 = Achievement-Oriented Agentic, Profile 2 = Ego-Oriented Agentic, Profile 3 = Insecure, Profile 4 = Communal, Profile 5 = Socially Adjusted
Figure 3. A graphical representation of the five personality profiles identified by Espinoza, Daljeet, & Meyer, 2020. Note. Units are expressed in standardized factor scores. Ach-or Agentic = Achievement-Oriented Agentic, Ego-or Agentic = Ego-oriented Agentic. HH = Honesty-Humility, Emo = Emotionality, Extra = Extraversion, Agree = Agreeableness, Con = Conscientiousness, Open = Openness to Experience.
Appendix I

Study Instructions

Instructions

Please read the job description and skill requirements for the job of Retail Sales Manager that will appear on the following pages. Please take as much time as you need to read this information, as you will be asked questions about it later on in the study.

Job Description: Retail Sales Manager

Directly supervise and coordinate activities of retail sales workers in an establishment or department. Duties may include management functions, such as purchasing, budgeting, accounting, and personnel work, in addition to supervisory duties

Important Tasks of Retail Sales Manager:

- Provide customer service by greeting and assisting customers and responding to customer inquiries and complaints.
- Direct and supervise employees engaged in sales, inventory-taking, reconciling cash receipts, or in performing services for customer.
- Examine merchandise to ensure that it is correctly priced and displayed and that it functions as advertised.

Necessary Skills:

- Producing written communications
- Talking to others
- Working well with others
- Solving problems as they occur
- Being organized
- Ability to order or arrange things
- Basic computer skills
Your Task

Imagine you are looking for a new job as a Retail Sales Manager and have just completed the final round of interviews for two jobs you are interested in and qualified for.

The two retail sales manager jobs are at two different companies.

Assume that the type of position, salary, location, etc. offered by the two companies described below are identical to one another, and to other job offers you might expect to receive.

The two companies described in the table that follows are very similar to each other (e.g. both are very large companies in the same industry) and have allocated the same amount of money to distribute to their employees.

However, there is one important way in which these the two companies differ. The two companies use different systems for evaluating the job performance of their employees.

Job performance evaluation systems are very important and are used to determine how rewards are distributed. Typical rewards include pay increases, bonuses, and promotions.

Please review the descriptions of the evaluation systems these companies use (presented next) as well as additional comments that are provided.

**Note: Please take as much time as you need to read the text on the following pages, you will be asked questions about its content at a later time in the survey.**
Appendix J

Vignettes

Relative Ratings Presented First

GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company #1: Absolute Job Performance Rating System</th>
<th>Company #2: Relative Job Performance Rating System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In this company, supervisors rate the performance of the employees by judging an employee's performance behaviors against a set of pre-determined standards.</td>
<td>• In this company, supervisors rate the performance of employees by comparing their performance behaviors to those of a reference group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• These pre-determined standards are often attached to points along a scale that ranges from 0 to 100. For example, &quot;Extremely Poor Performance&quot; may be associated with a score of 0, &quot;Moderate Performance&quot; a score of 50, and &quot;Extremely Effective Performance&quot; a score of 100.</td>
<td>• In this case the reference group is all other retail sales managers that the supervisors are familiar with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork).</td>
<td>• Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervisors provide a rating out of 100 for each dimension of performance that reflects the employee's performance on that dimension. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply &quot;Moderate Performance&quot; on written and verbal communication ability.</td>
<td>• The supervisor provides a rating from 0-100 for each performance dimension indicating the percentage of retail sales managers in the reference group the employee performed better than. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply they performed better than 50% of the reference group with respect to written and verbal communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards.</td>
<td>• Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company #1: Absolute Job Performance Rating System</th>
<th>Company #2: Relative Job Performance Rating System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In this system, many people receive the same, or very similar performance ratings, and the ratings tend to be high.</td>
<td>• This system makes it clear who the high and low performers are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The best performers often receive performance ratings that are only slightly higher than those of typical performers.</td>
<td>• This system rewards employees who work the hardest and perform the best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This system does not do a good job of making it clear who the highest and lowest performers are. This may reduce employees’ motivation to improve their performance.</td>
<td>• Only employees who perform better than most receive additional rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The pre-determined standards for performance (e.g., &quot;Extremely Poor Performance&quot;, &quot;Moderate Performance&quot;, &quot;Extremely Effective Performance&quot;) are not always well defined.</td>
<td>• If you struggle to perform as well as most retail sales managers do, you will be less likely to receive rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This system of evaluating performance is commonly used by organizations</td>
<td>• This system may encourage competition among employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company #1: Absolute Job Performance Rating System</th>
<th>Company #2: Relative Job Performance Rating System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Performance Ratings" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Performance Ratings" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Performance Ratings](image3)
**INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL-COMPARATIVE FEEDBACK**

### SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Rating System</th>
<th>Company #1: Absolute Job Performance Rating System</th>
<th>Company #2: Relative Job Performance Rating System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Description</strong></td>
<td>In this company, supervisors rate the performance of employees by judging an employee's performance behaviors against a set of pre-determined standards. These pre-determined standards are often attached to points along a scale that ranges from 0 to 100. For example: &quot;Extremely Poor Performance&quot; may be associated with a score of 0, &quot;Moderate Performance&quot; a score of 50, and &quot;Extremely Effective Performance&quot; a score of 100. Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork). Supervisors provide a rating of 0-100 for each dimension of performance that reflects the employee's performance on that dimension. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply &quot;Moderate Performance&quot; on written and verbal communication ability. Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards.</td>
<td>In this company, supervisors rate the performance of employees by comparing their performance behaviors to those of a reference group. In this case the reference group is all other retail sales managers that the supervisors are familiar with. Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork). The supervisor provides a rating from 0-100 for each performance dimension indicating the percentage of retail sales managers in the reference group that employees performed better than. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply they performed better than 50% of the reference group with respect to written and verbal communication. Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Features</strong></td>
<td>In this system, many people receive the same or very similar performance ratings, and the ratings tend to be high. The best performers often receive performance ratings that are only slightly higher than those of typical performers. This system does not do a good job of making it clear who the highest and lowest performers are. This may reduce employees' motivation to improve their performance. The pre-determined standards for performance (e.g., &quot;Extremely Poor Performance,&quot; &quot;Moderate Performance,&quot; &quot;Extremely Effective Performance&quot;) are not always well defined. This system of evaluating performance is commonly used by organizations.</td>
<td>This system makes it clear who the high and low performers are. This system rewards employees who work the hardest and perform the best. Only employees who perform better than most receive additional rewards. If you struggle to perform as well as most retail sales managers do, you will be less likely to receive rewards. This system may encourage competition among employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Level</th>
<th>0</th>
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<th>20</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Poor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extreme Effective</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Level</th>
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<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Fairly Above Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After considering the information presented to you above, which company would you prefer to accept an offer of employment from? The evaluation system of company #1 that uses the Absolute Rating System or the evaluation system of company #2 that uses the Absolute Rating System?

I would:

- Strongly prefer the offer from the Company that uses the Absolute Rating System (Company #1)
- Slightly prefer the offer from the Company that uses the Absolute Rating System (Company #1)
- Slightly prefer the offer from the Company that uses the Relative Rating System (Company #2)
- Strongly prefer the offer from the Company that uses the Relative Rating System (Company #2)

### Absolute Ratings Presented First

#### GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS

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#### Key Features

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<td>This system does not do a good job of making it clear who the highest and lowest performers are. This may reduce employees' motivation to improve their performance. The pre-determined standards for performance (e.g., &quot;Extremely Poor Performance,&quot; &quot;Moderate Performance,&quot; &quot;Extremely Effective Performance&quot;) are not always well defined. This system of evaluating performance is commonly used by organizations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL-COMPARATIVE FEEDBACK

**EXAMPLE**

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<tr>
<th>Company #1: Relative Job Performance Rating System</th>
<th>Company #2: Absolute Job Performance Rating System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Relative Job Performance Rating System" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Absolute Job Performance Rating System" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUMMARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **General Description** | • In this company, supervisors rate the performance of employees by comparing their performance behaviours to those of a reference group.  
• In this case the reference group is all other retail sales managers that the supervisors are familiar with.  
• Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork).  
• The supervisor provides a rating from 0-100 for each performance dimension indicating the percentage of retail sales managers in the reference group the employee performed better than. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply they performed better than 50% of the reference group with respect to written and verbal communication ability.  
• Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards | • In this company, supervisors rate the performance of the employees by judging an employee's performance behaviours against a set of pre-determined standards.  
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• Performance is rated across multiple job-relevant dimensions (written and verbal communication, problem solving, organization, and teamwork).  
• Supervisors provide a rating out of 100 for each dimension of performance that reflects the employee’s performance on that dimension. For example, a rating of 50 on written and verbal communication would imply “Moderate Performance” on written and verbal communication ability.  
• Employees with the highest ratings may receive additional rewards |
| **Key Features** | • This system makes it clear who the high and low performers are.  
• This system rewards employees who work the hardest and perform the best.  
• Only employees who perform better than most receive additional rewards.  
• If you struggle to perform as well as most retail sales managers do, you will be less likely to receive rewards.  
• This system may encourage competition among employees. | • In this system, many people receive the same, or very similar performance ratings, and the ratings tend to be high.  
• The best performers often receive performance ratings that are only slightly higher than those of typical performers.  
• This system does not do a good job of making it clear who the highest and lowest performers are. This may reduce employees’ motivation to improve their performance.  
• The pre-determined standards for performance (e.g., “Extremely Poor Performance”, “Moderate Performance”, “Extremely Effective Performance”) are not always well defined.  
• This system of evaluating performance is commonly used by organizations |

After considering the information presented to you above, which company would you prefer to accept an offer or employment from: 1. The evaluation system of Company #1 that uses the Relative Rating System or the evaluation system of Company #2 that uses the Absolute Rating System?

I would:
- Strongly prefer to work for the company that uses the Relative Rating System (Company #1)
- Slightly prefer to work for the company that uses the Relative Rating System (Company #1)
- Slightly prefer to work for the company that uses the Absolute Rating System (Company #2)
- Strongly prefer to work for the company that uses the Absolute Rating System (Company #2)
Appendix K

Sample Items from the International Cognitive Ability Resource Test (ICAR)


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2014.01.004

Sample Verbal Reasoning Item
The sixth month of the year is:
  ○ September
  ○ July
  ○ May
  ○ August
  ○ June
  ○ April
  ○ None of these
  ○ I don't know

Sample Letter and Number Series Item
In the following alphanumeric series, what letter comes next? K, N, P, S, U, ...
  ○ S
  ○ T
  ○ U
  ○ V
  ○ W
  ○ X
  ○ None of these
  ○ I don't know

Sample Matrix Reasoning Item
Please indicate which is the best answer to complete the figure below.
Sample Three-dimensional Rotation Item
All the cubes below have a different image on each side. Select the choice that could represent a rotation of the cube labeled X.

○ A
○ B
○ C
○ D
○ E
○ F
Appendix L

Modified Social Comparison Orientation Items

1. I often compare how I am performing at work to the performance of my co-workers
2. If I want to learn more about something at work, I try to find out what other employees think or know about it
3. Dropped
4. I often compare my co-workers’ performance to the performance of other co-workers
5. I always like to know how well I am performing compared to other employees in a similar situation
6. I am not the type of person who compares myself with my peers and colleagues
7. If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with the work of my co-workers
8. Dropped
9. Dropped
10. Dropped
11. Dropped

Original Scale Source:

Appendix M

Content Questions

1) In the job description you were provided with, which was listed as an important skill?
   - Writing
   - Lifting Heavy Objects
   - Computer Programming
   - Talking to Others
   - Using Power Tools

2) What type of job were you told to imagine you were looking for?
   - Accounting Manager
   - Sales Associate
   - Retail Sales Manager
   - General Contractor
   - Food Services Worker

3) Which of the following was a **Key Feature** of the **Relative Rating System**?
   - This system may encourage competition among employees
   - This system scales your scores relative to the performance of the company
   - This system rewards you relative to others who receive rewards
   - This system uses well defined performance standards
   - This system is commonly used

4) Which of the following was a **Key Feature** of the **Absolute Rating System**?
   - This system is commonly used by organizations
   - This system uses the widest range of scores
   - Only the best performers get the highest score under this system
   - Performance standards are determined by the supervisor
   - This system involves comparing an employee's performance to that of others
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

The goal of this program of research was to investigate whether there are individual differences that facilitate the acceptance of, or preferences for, social-comparative performance feedback. In doing so, we hoped to establish how individual differences could be leveraged to mitigate the reported poor reactions people may have when presented with social-comparative feedback (Feeney, Goffin, & Schneider, 2016; Roch, Sternburgh, & Caputo, 2007). In addition, we sought to determine whether individual differences were associated with a preference for social-comparative feedback, as this would allow for researchers and practitioners alike to increase their ability to leverage social-comparative performance ratings and feedback by providing it to those who are most likely to accept it.

The results of the first study, with limited exception, do not present evidence that the individual differences we examined in the study are likely to be involved in a ratee’s reactions to, and acceptance of, social-comparative performance feedback. More specifically, although it was found that when feedback is positive, positive affect does play a role in a ratee’s acceptance of social-comparative and absolute feedback, the study produced no evidence suggesting that negative affect or emotion regulation mediate the relationship between receiving absolute or social-comparative feedback, and a ratee’s reactions to and acceptance of the feedback. A secondary aim of this study was to advance a novel methodology that can be adapted to study various elements of the performance management process. Notably, this study design may have been unsuccessful in terms of as maintaining the psychological fidelity of a proper performance management experience. Many participants reported that they did not believe the feedback they received was real, which may have had important consequences for the results of the study.
Bernardin and Villanova (1986) argue that even the best designed studies will not to fully capture the psychological realities of the performance management process. In the future researchers seeking to reevaluate the relationships examined in this study should consider the 15 design considerations Bernardin and Villanova put forward to help researchers bolster the psychological fidelity and external validity of performance management experiments. Ultimately, the results of this study presents limited evidence that the individual differences we examined play a key role in facilitating a ratee’s reaction to receiving social-comparative feedback, a topic on which more researcher is needed as a whole.

The results of the second study in this program of research presents evidence that is consistent with previous research suggesting that individual differences are involved in facilitating an individual’s preference for social-comparative feedback. It was found that individuals who prefer social comparisons, are hard-working and are strongly motivated to achieve (i.e., those high in Diligence; Lee & Ashton, 2004), and are organized and systematic in their approach to work and life (i.e., those high in Organization; Lee & Ashton, 2004) prefer social-comparative performance ratings over traditional absolute performance ratings. Conversely, the study found no evidence that individual differences such as Cognitive Ability, Self-Efficacy, Narcissism, and the components of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotionality, Honesty-Humility, or Openness were associated with a preference for social-comparative performance feedback. Similarly, the results of our study found no evidence that personality profiles (Espinoza, Daljeet, & Meyer, 2020) differentially relate to preferences for social-comparative performance feedback. The results of this study have interesting implications for research and practice insofar as researchers and practitioners alike can leverage the findings to provide social-comparative feedback to those who would most likely prefer to receive it.
Moreover, this research has implications for how organizations that use, or intend to use, social-comparative performance ratings design and develop their recruitment and retention efforts, as these findings suggest that individuals with certain characteristics may be more, or less, inclined to work for an organization that makes use of social-comparative performance ratings.

Overall, the results of this program of research indicate that although we found limited evidence based on the first study that some individual differences may not facilitate or mitigate against reactions to social-comparative performance feedback, certain segments of the population may be more interested than others in receiving social-comparative performance feedback. This will allow researchers and practitioners to improve the way and frequency with which social-comparative performance ratings can be implemented and leveraged in organizational contexts. However, as is often the case, the results of this program of work are only the first of many steps in evaluating the full array of individual differences that may or may not be involved in how people react to or develop a preference for social-comparative performance ratings. Accordingly, more research is needed to comprehensively understand this phenomenon in and outside of the workplace.
References


Curriculum Vitae

Kabir N. Daljeet
Department of Psychology

Education

Ph.D. - Industrial/Organizational Psychology, University of Western Ontario, 2021 (expected)
Thesis: Individual Differences In Preferences For Relative Feedback In The Workplace

M.Sc - Industrial/Organizational Psychology, University of Western Ontario, 2015
Thesis: Reactions to Negative Feedback: The role of Resilience and Implications for Counterproductivity

B.A. - Honors Specialization Psychology & Major in Socio-Cultural Anthropology, University of Western Ontario, 2012

Professional Affiliation

Chargé d’enseignement/Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Université de Montréal 2020-Present

Refereed Journal Publications


Conference Presentations


Espinoza, J.A.***, Daljeet, K. N.***, Meyer, J. P, & Dunlop P.D. (2021, June). Examining the robustness of HEXACO profiles across measures. In J.P. Meyer (Chair), Profiling Personality: Exploring the Generalizability, Meaning, and Implications of HEXACO Trait Profiles. Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the SELF conference, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. *** Both Espinoza, J.A. and Daljeet, K. N. contributed equally and should be considered first author of this paper


Daljeet, K.N. & Goffin, R.D. (May. 2017). Reactions to Negative Feedback: The Role of Resilience and
Implications for Counterproductivity. Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Psychological Science, Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America.


Schneider, T. J., Goffin, R. D., Daljeet, K. N., & Lessard, F.-E. (2014, August). Donnez-nous vos mots de passe pour vos sites de réseautage social: Implications pour la sélection du personnel. In M. Malo & J-S. Boudrias (Chair), Investir dans le capital humain: De la sélection du personnel à la
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL-COMPARATIVE FEEDBACK

*rétroaction aux candidats.* Symposium conducted at the 18th annual congress of L’Association Internationale de Psychologie du Travail de Langue Française, Florence, Italy.


Schneider, T. J., Daljeet, K. N., & Goffin, R. D. (2013, June). *Social networking sites and personality: Implications for selection.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Psychology Association, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

Invited Talks


Awards and Achievements

Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2018-2019 - $15 000
Canadian Council of Departments of Psychology Teaching Assistant Award – $50
Human Resources Professional Association Award - $2500
Social Sciences Graduate Alumni Award (2017) - $3000
1st Place poster award: Best poster in I/O Psychology, as awarded by CSIOP at CPA 2015 - $250
Reva Gerstein Fellowship for Masters Study in Psychology (2013) – $2800
3rd Place poster award: Best Poster in I/O Psychology, as awarded by CSIOP at CPA 2013 - $100
Dean’s Honor List 2011-2012

Courses Taught

Research Methods and Statistics for Psychology (2820E) Summer 2018

Teaching Assistantships/Lab Instructor

Research Methods In Personality Assessment (Psychology 3850)* 2017 – 2019
*nominated for Graduate Teaching Assistant Award (2017-2018;2018-2019)
Managing and Measuring Performance in the Workplace (Psychology 3610) 2018 - 2018
Honors Thesis Class (Psychology 4850) 2016 - 2017
Introduction to I/O Psychology (Psychology 2660) 2016 - 2016
Applications of Psychology (Psychology 2990) 2015 - 2015
Statistics and Research Methods (Psychology 2820)* 2014 – 2015
*nominated for Graduate Teaching Assistant Award (2014-2015)
Introduction to Psychology (Psychology 1000) 2013 - 2014

Non-Peer Reviewed Publications


### Service

**PTO Graduate Student Selection Committee, Université de Montréal**

**Reviewer**
- Personality and Individual Differences (Ad-hoc)
- Journal of Personality (Ad-hoc)
- Western Undergraduate Psychology Journal

2021 - Present

**UWO Psychology Colloquium Committee**

2019 - 2020

**Founder and Coordinator Western Undergraduate Psychology Journal**

2012 - 2017

**I/O Psychology Brown Bag Organizer**

2014 - 2016

**UWO Undergraduate Affairs Committee**

2013 – 2016

**UWO Psychology Curriculum Review Board**

2014 - 2015

### Mentorship

**Graduate Students**

- Gabriella Decoste, Université de Montréal (D.Psy, Year 1) 2021-Present
- Samuel Gilbert, Université de Montréal (D.Psy, Year 1) 2021-Present

**Independent Research Projects**

- Vickie Bergeron, Université de Montréal (Undergraduate) 2021-Present

**Honors Students**

- Benjamin Moon, University of Western Ontario 2017-2019
- Rohin Sharma, University of Western Ontario 2018-2019

### Relevant Work Experience

**Research Consultant**, Human Resources Systems Group

2019 - 2020

**Research Associate**, Sigma Assessment Systems (London, ON)

2015 – 2018

**Contract Consultant**, SOKANU Career Tests

2014 – 2014

**Research Assistant**, University of Western Ontario

2013 – 2020

### Professional Memberships

- Canadian Psychology Association (CPA)
- Canadian Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology (CSIOP)
- Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP)