

## MANAGERS' FEEDBACK SEEKING ABOUT THEIR JOB PERFORMANCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AND PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he study examined feedback seeking process and in particular those instances where managers are more or less likely to seek feedback about their performance. Using in-depth interviews with ten managers, the investigation afforded a richer account of feedback seeking than is typically delivered by survey based studies. Content analysis of the textual data was undertaken to identify themes within grounded theory framework which facilitated the formulation of theoretical interpretative model. In a self-regulation model, preliminary findings suggest that managers are more likely to seek feedback about their performance when they perceive uncertainties and difficulties in their managerial functions and see the need to develop their skills in order to achieve organizational goals. It is proposed that the theoretical construct underlying these findings is 'self-efficacy': if managers feel ill-equipped (low self-efficacy) to deal with a particular management situation, they will be more likely to seek feedback as self-development imperative.

**Key words:** Job performance feedback, Managerial functions, Human resources development, Self-development, Self-regulation Self-efficacy.

## 1. Introduction

During approximately the past three decades, explaining job performance feedback seeking process, specifically, when and why employees decide whether or not to seek feedback about their performance in organisations has been a central and enduring quest of scholars, researchers and practitioners in industrial, organisational psychology and management (Amah, 2009; Ashford, 1986; Ashford, Blatt and Vande Walle, 2003; Asumeng, 2012,2013; Chan and Leijter, 2012; Fletcher, 2008, 2012; Kluger and De Nisi, 1996; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000; Jawahar, 2010; Millward, Asumeng and McDowall, 2010). This is particularly so as in a self-regulatory framework, many studies suggest that active feedback seeking about job performance has a positive impact on subsequent performance. That is, an employee who takes a self-regulatory responsibility and thereby seek feedback about his/her job performance is likely to use the feedback diagnostic information for self-development and performance improvement (Atwarter and Brett, 2006; Chan and Leijter, 2012; Cianci and Bierstaker, 2009; De Shon and Tara, 2009; Fletcher, 2008; Haittie and Timperley, 2007; Heslin and Lathan, 2004; Kluger and Nir, 2006; Kuvaas, 2011; Porath and Bateman, 2006). However, the impact of feedback on performance in terms of the mechanisms involved has neither been clearly determined nor explained, particularly in a managerial domain in an organisational setting (Asumeng, 2013; Atwarter and Brent, 2006; Bailey and Austin, 2006; Hawkins and Heflin, 2011; Jawahar, 2010; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000). In an attempt to address this gap in the empirical literature, several studies have investigated motives, that is, the perceived benefits and perceived costs that people consider in order to decide whether or not to seek feedback (Ansell, Lievens and Levy, 2007; Fedor, Rensford and Adams, 1992; Iglén and Davis, 2000; Illies, De Pater and Judge, 2007; Trope and Neter, 1994; Tsui and Ashford, 1994). Others have investigated situational factors, including feedback source characteristics, and individual differences variables that may account for feedback seeking behavior (Ashford, Blatt and Vande Walle, 2003; Asumeng, 2013; Atwarter and Brett, 2006; Bailey and Austin, 2006; Fletcher and Baldry, 2000; Heslin and Latham, 2004; Illies et al, 2007; Jawahar, 2010; Tuckey, Brewer and Williamson, 2002).

A noticeable feature of these studies, however, is that not only have they yielded little insight into the processes involved in feedback seeking, particularly, the managerial domain, it appears they have not produced any coherent theoretical approaches to explain feedback seeking. This can be understood with two reasons. The first concerns methodological limitations. Secondly, it appears there is no theoretical approach that adequately and coherently explains feedback seeking and its impact on job performance in organisations (Amah, 2009; Ashford, Blatt and Vande Walle, 2003; Bailey and Austin, 2006; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000; Kluger and De Nisi, 1996). These two reasons; methodological and theoretical concerns are reviewed in turn in the following two sections.

### 1.1 *Methods in feedback seeking research*

Most of the studies in feedback seeking are predominantly quantitative and correlational and appear not to provide any leverage to explain the managerial feedback seeking process (Alveson, 2002; Hamlin, 2004). This is because quantitative studies do not provide the contextual details rich in insights about a phenomenon under study, rather they justify the need for a type of research which can provide such richer details and a deeper understanding beyond what quantitative studies offer (Alveson, 2002). This calls for a new direction with different approaches to managerial and leadership research based on subjectivist and social process perspective and grounded theory, a research method most often associated with qualitative research in the social sciences. Qualitative research, particularly, within grounded theory approach helps the understanding of complex phenomenon such as feedback seeking behaviours and their meanings through the exploration of the social processes that produce them, and the generation of theoretical or conceptual models to explain them, with no preconceived conceptual models or theoretical frameworks to be tested (Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 2001; Hamlin, 2004; Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003; Punch, 2005). Despite its suitability to understanding processes, qualitative methodology is notably lacking in feedback research (Alveson, 2002; Asumeng, 2013; Fletcher, 2012; Barker, 2000). This situation may account for lack of theoretical perspectives which comprehensively explain the feedback seeking process as discussed in the next section.

### 1.2 *Theories of Job Performance Feedback*

Two main theoretical perspectives of job performance feedback seeking process located in the feedback literature are Self-Regulation or Control Theory (Ashford and Tsui, 1991; Carver, 2004), and Feedback Intervention Theory (DeNisi and Kluger, 2000; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). Self-Regulation or Control Theory, a cybernetic model of self-attention (Carver and Scheier, 1981), is based on the assumptions that if a person detects a negative discrepancy between his/her performance and a designated standard of performance that is expected from them (i.e. there is public accountability), he or she could be motivated to reduce the discrepancy by improving performance. The theory suggests that discrepancy between current/actual performance and the standard performance is detected through feedback ratings and the person could be motivated to reduce the discrepancy by making effort to improve performance. By contrast,

feedback intervention theory is concerned with organisation-based external mechanism of using feedback information to improve performance effectiveness. Such interventions are aimed at bridging the gap between actual performance and the organization's standard or expected performance using feedback information. These theoretical perspectives apparently, do not comprehensively, and coherently explain the feedback seeking process, including its impact on performance in organizations. For example, the theories appear not provide those instances where employees are more or less likely to seek feedback about their performance, what feedback information a person is most inclined to seek, when and why their feedback seeking? Consequently, explanations for the feedback seeking process and its impact on performance outcomes appear quite limited (Bailey and Austin, 2006; DeNisi and Kluger, 2000; Maurer, Mitchel and Barbeite, 2002). In their ground-breaking meta-analysis of the feedback literature which earned them awards from the Organisational Behaviour Division of The Academy of Management and The Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology, DeNisi and Kluger (2000) lamented the inadequacy, lack of coherent and comprehensive theory on the feedback seeking process as:

The striking results of our meta-analysis led us to search theories or models that described [and/or explained] how feedback affect behaviour and performance. We could find no unified theory, but there were pieces of theories that were useful, especially the control theory. We took these pieces and proposed a model of our own, which we called feedback intervention theory (De Nisi and Kluger, 2000: 131).

This situation makes feedback seeking ill-understood phenomena in industrial and organizational psychology and has led to re-examination of feedback processes in order to unravel more powerful and rigorous conceptual models and theoretical frameworks that may better offer mechanistic and functional explanation of the process (Ansell et al., 2007; Jawahar, 2010; Millward et al, 2010). In short, the lack of a coherent theoretical approach on offer to explain the feedback process leaves gaps in our understanding of managerial feedback seeking in organizations, and raises the following research questions.

## 2. Research Questions

What instances, when and why are managers more or less likely to seek feedback about their performance on the job?

The paper addresses these research questions by examining managerial feedback seeking propensities, using a qualitative methodology which is especially well suited to understanding processes but is notably lacking in feedback research. An in-depth interview was used to facilitate managers in reflecting on their own feedback seeing tendencies across typical management situations. Content analysis of the textual data, within a grounded theory analytic approach was used to derive higher order interpretations.

## 3. Method

**Participants:** In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with ten managers (seven males and three females, ranging in age between 38 and 52 years) purposively selected through personal contacts from across both private and public organizations in South East England, UK. Managers had tenure of at least one year in a senior management position.

**Instruments:** The instruments for data collection were a brief interview guide for unstructured interviewing and a digital voice recorder Olympus Model VN-2100 for recording the interview sessions. The key questions were: 'As a manager, when do you usually seek feedback about your performance in your organisation?' 'Think of and state specific instances when you seek or tend to seek feedback about your performance.' 'Why do you seek feedback about such functions?' 'What are some of the functions or instances when you don't seek feedback about your performance?' 'Why don't you seek feedback about such functions?'

**Procedures:** There were two phases of the interview; the main interview and feeding back findings/verification phase. There was a period of three weeks between the first and the second phases of the interviewing. Interviews were conducted in participants' workplaces in a private setting, either during lunch-breaks or after close of work. During the main interview which lasted between 90-120 minutes, respondents were asked to think of and state functions in their managerial domain on which they seek or tend to seek feedback about their performance, and explain why. Through probing, prompting and clarification during the unstructured interview, managers were able to delve deeply into the reasons underlying their feedback seeking. Phase two of the interview which lasted about 10-20 minutes involved presenting back the findings in a synthesized form to participants for verification of their authenticity and to ensure the validity or trustworthiness of the data in qualitative studies. All participants confirmed that the findings reflected their feedback seeking tendencies. Ethical considerations included the researcher offering assurances of confidentiality to participants and asking for permission to audio tape the session for transcription purposes.

#### **4. Data Analysis Technique: Content analysis within grounded Theory Approach**

The data was content analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach which has three interactive concurrent stages/components, and within grounded theory framework (Glaser, 2001; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Using this approach, first, participants' responses which were audio recorded were transcribed verbatim, coded and the main themes for each participant (case-specific themes) were generated. (Refer to Table 1 for participants' case-specific themes). Second, the data (participants' case specific themes) were systematically aggregated into themes/sub-themes with the aim of suggesting shared meanings; categorized and organized into a relational model. The model shows an analytical version of the feedback seeking process, indicating sequential relationships of the main categories and their corresponding components/elements. Third, consistent with grounded theory framework, a core variable/theoretical framework/construct underlying the findings was proposed. (Refer to Figure1). Grounded theory is a research method/analytic approach which focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from qualitative data. An advantage is that theory/conceptual framework/conceptual model is generated which is contextually sensitive, persuasive and relevant to the phenomena under study (Charmaz 2006; Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003). According to the grounded theory approach, the proposed theoretical framework/core category or concept is the theoretical construct underlying the findings, that is; it potentially explains participants' feedback seeking tendencies in organizations. Moreover, in grounded theory, the most important canon, the concept of 'theoretical saturation' or 'theoretical completeness' of the theory or conceptual model generated was observed and ensured in the study and data analysis. 'Theoretical saturation,' is when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001). The data and analysis did not warrant gathering fresh data as the proposed conceptual/theoretical model generated in the analysis is persuasive, coherent and explains managers' feedback seeking propensities and provides more insight into the phenomenon under study.

The main themes/categories, subthemes/components generated, the theoretical model, and the conclusions/propositions formulated are presented as the findings. In addition to aggregating participants' responses into themes, the findings are presented with their pertinent quotes which show their individual feedback seeking experiences. All participants are represented by at least one quote to ensure adequate representation. The textual quotes are used as examples to illustrate and substantiate a theme/sub-theme.

#### **5. Findings**

Findings are organized in three parts, in accordance with the norms of reporting content analytic textual data within grounded theory framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Punch, 2005). The first part is on the main themes generated from individual participants' responses, that is, case-specific feedback seeking themes. The second is on the main themes/categories and sub-themes/components obtained from analyzing and aggregating participants' case-specific themes. In this part, findings are organized under each of the themes/categories, backed with the sub themes/components, illustrating them with pertinent quotes. The third part is a relational model which shows an analytical version of the feedback seeking process, indicating sequential relationships of the main categories/variables and their corresponding components/elements; and a proposed core variable/theoretical construct underlying the findings.

### 5.1 Managers' case specific feedback seeking themes

Managers' case specific themes underlying their feedback seeking propensities are presented in Table 1

**Table1. Participants' case-specific feedback seeking propensity themes**

Participant	Feedback seeking themes
Case 1	Uncertainty of knowledge, ambiguity of tasks, uncertainty of performance, novelty of function, uncertainty of outcome/results/output, difficulty in evaluating function effectiveness, personal development, uncertainty of guidelines and roles .
Case 2	More understanding, exploratory, curiosity, developmental, qualitative work, complex work, no fixed criteria, skill development., judgmental, analytical, skill based, work novelty, confirmation of ideas.
Case 3	Uncertainty of performance, confirmation of approach, uncertainty of solution, beneficial for personal development, new ideas, less confidence, more knowledge, seeks second opinion, new ideas, feels incompetent, difficulty in approach, improvement in performance.
Case 4	Decision making, uncertainty of outcome, unique functions, unpredictable outcome/results, problem solving, new ideas, dynamic functions, subjective procedures.
Case 5	Uncertainties in functions, dynamic function, complex functions, difficult functions, functions crucial to organisational goals, others views matter, judgmental functions, decision making, less procedural functions, uncertainty of outcome, uncertainty of performance
Case 6	Fundamental to organisational goals, unpredictable outcome, decision making, non-procedural, critical function, personal development, complex task, judgemental, unpredictable procedures, critical outcomes, strategic functions.
Case 7	Skill based, critical to organizational success, useful information, more knowledge, Uncertainty of function, confirmation of results, interpersonal related, others opinion, dynamic, perceptions, quality/standards related, others' judgements, more experience.
Case 8	Crucial functions, critical to organizational success, self- development oriented, uncertainty of delivery, uncertainty of methods, useful information, organisational goals, uncertainty of results,
Case 9	Fundamental to organizational goals, difficult tasks, new ideas, staff development, uncertainty of procedure, uncertainty of function, judgments, unpredictable outcome, new skills, novel/challenging functions, less predictable outcome.
Case 10	Others' inputs matter, more understanding of functions, less procedural, new ideas, difficult task, expertise, experience, novel ideas, exploratory, critical functions, novel tasks., special expertise.

These themes/categories were further analysed and aggregated into three main themes within the framework of grounded theory to generate a proposed theoretical model for the explanation of managers' feedback seeking propensities.

### 5.2 Main themes/categories on Managers' feedback seeking propensities: When and why do managers seek feedback?

Analysis of the case-specific themes produced three main categories/themes that underline participant's job performance feedback seeking behaviours: *perceived uncertainties*, *perceived difficulties*; and *skill development*. The argument advanced is that managers are more likely to seek feedback about their job performance when they perceive uncertainties and difficulties in their functions and need to develop their skills for performance improvement to achieve organizational goals. In contrast, they are less likely to seek feedback when they are certain and confident about their performance, do not perceive any difficulties in their functions and do not need to develop their skills for performance improvement because they are well equipped for their jobs.

### 5.2.1 Perceived Uncertainties about Managerial Functions

Managers said that they tended to seek feedback about their performance as a result of perceived uncertainties about their functions. The main subcategories/components managers expressed uncertainties were: understanding and making right decisions; managerial functions (what to do); managerial approach/delivery (how to do it); and the outcomes (results). In this context, 'perceived uncertainties' is concerned with when managers are not sure of the appropriate knowledge and skills, the right approach to deliver their functions and hence the outcome or output of their solutions to achieving organisational goals. For example,

Somebody comes to work, as a manager, I assign duties to them, I supervise them. I must see to it, I must know at the end of the day that the work has been done. I must get feedback to assess that my duty as a manager, to ensure that the work is done. I will need feedback, in terms of job completion and the quality of work done. I will need feedback to evaluate and ascertain if the work has been done.

I think I will be more likely to seek feedback on delegation of duties and duty assignments I will be conferring responsibility on people. I want to make sure that I have chosen the right people for the right tasks. Have I made the right judgment? The success of these functions depends on my judgment ability.

I am more likely to seek feedback to confirm that my intentions, ideas and proposals are the best that can be put forward. I would seek it as a second opinion. I may possibly seek feedback. I think I would seek a second opinion if I did lack 100% certainty in a particular solution. I would seek feedback from colleagues if it will positively influence the outcome. I will value the input to improve the solutions.

Conversely, managers said that they would be less likely to seek feedback when they are certain of their performance.

I would be unlikely to seek feedback; I would be confident in the solutions. I would not want to invite feedback to interfere with the execution of the work. I don't think feedback will improve the outcome.

I don't think I will need feedback on my leadership skills. Because I know, I am sure that I am a good leader. If I am not sure of my performance, I would need feedback .... But this one, I am sure. I will less likely seek feedback on it.

### 5.2.2 Perceived Difficulties of Managerial Functions

'Perceived difficulty' pertains to situations where managers see functions as complex, exploratory, unique, dynamic, multi-skilled based and novel, involving problem solution judgments and decision making. Delivery of such functions requires new ideas, others opinions and experiences, and are crucial to achieving organisational goals.

Managers are more likely to seek feedback about their performance when they perceive difficulties about their functions. On the other hand, they are less likely to seek feedback when they don't perceive any difficulties about their functions. For example:

I will seek feedback because it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this function. It is abroad function which involves judgments and decision making. It is multi-skilled and dynamic; needs a lot of skills and experience and sometimes need to seek opinion from colleagues elsewhere.

This is a complex, dynamic and difficult task which needs feedback. It is a broad function which requires the interplay of many skills. It requires inputs from various angles. Results are difficult to determine.

Core managerial functions which involve the making and implementation of important decisions are perceived as difficult particularly when they are crucial to achieving organizational goals. For example:

Training and performance evaluation are essential or crucial for the success or otherwise of the organisation. They are the core managerial functions. They are people focused and involve developing them. Staffing is very crucial for the success of the organisation. The performance of employees depends on the training they have had. They involve a lot of work and are quite difficult. These are crucial functions I would seek feedback on, compared with staff meetings which are routine

### 5.2.3 Self /Skill Development for Managerial Performance Improvement

The main components /sub themes of skills development expressed by managers are; development in knowledge, perceptions and understanding; judgments, decision making and solutions; personal development and expertise. 'Self/ Skill Development' in this context, is concerned with the use of feedback information that will enhance managers' capability by increasing their understanding of the complexities of their functions, expertise and their output, to improve their performance to achieve organisational goals. Managers are more likely to seek feedback for useful information that will help them to develop their skills and enhance their capability for performance improvement to achieve organizational goals. For example,

Feedback will enable me to know whether or not my team development and change management strategies are working. Without feedback, I will presume I am using the right methods in team development or in managing change and that there is no need to improve myself. But if I get feedback from my staff, it will enable me to know if I need to change my strategies, and improve myself.

Probably because I feel feedback on logistical planning and document preparation will improve, increase the possibility of doing a better job. That will improve my performance, whereas I don't think feedback on management of subcontractors will do the same.

On the other hand, they will be less likely to seek feedback if they perceive that they are well equipped for their jobs, and it will not provide them with any useful information in order to develop their skills and improve their performance. For example,

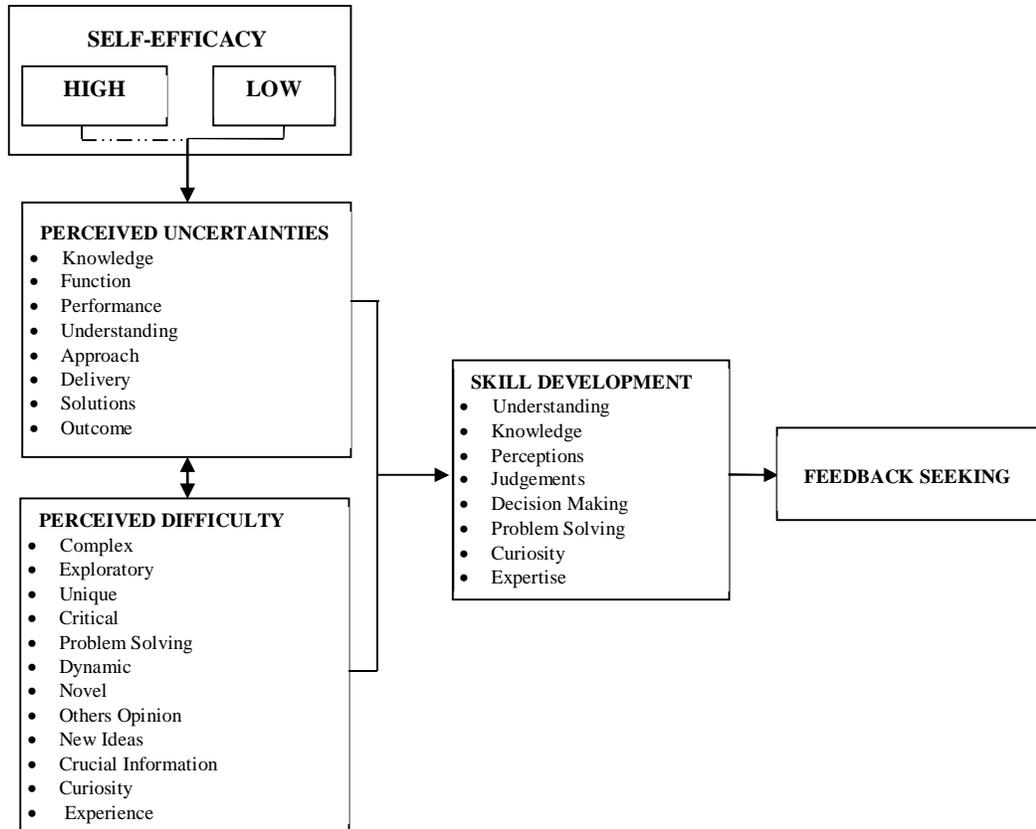
Zoning clients and ordering stocks are both practical activities. I will not need feedback. I would want feedback on appraisals and supervision to evaluate myself for personal development and improve my performance. I will less seek feedback on zoning clients and ordering stock because I am highly skilled on them. They have nothing to do with my personal development.

The research furnished the creation of an interpretative model of managerial feedback seeking propensities, and a proposed theoretical construct underlying it in an organisational setting.

### 5.3 A Model of Managers' Feedback seeking Propensities

A model which shows an analytical version of the feedback seeking process, indicating sequential relationships of the commonly constructed feedback seeking tendencies : perceived uncertainties; perceived difficulties; skill development ; and their corresponding components; and a proposed core variable /theoretical construct underwriting the findings is presented in Figure 1. The three key variables are coherently linked and explain the managerial feedback seeking tendencies identified in the study. It is

proposed that the theoretical construct underwriting these findings is 'self-efficacy'. The central proposition is that managers will seek feedback if they feel ill- equipped to deal with a particular situation, specifically, if they have low self efficacy (conceptualised in terms of perceived uncertainty or difficulty) in relation to a particular management situation, they will be more minded to seek feedback as part of a self-development imperative.



**Figure 1. A conceptual/theoretical model of managers' feedback seeking propensities**

## 6. Discussion

Managerial functions may be perceived as difficult in that they involve a substantial amount of uncertainty. It is also likely that a substantial amount of perceived difficulty could result in perceived uncertainty. However, in order to improve their performance, managers will seek feedback to develop their skills. Skills development will improve their understanding of complexities of functions, knowledge, perceptions, accurate judgments, decision making, problem solving, expertise, and personal development. These findings are consistent with studies which show that feedback seeking increases with new uncertain situations (Anseel and Lievens, 2006; Ashford, 1986; Ashford et al., 2003), and more difficult tasks (Eden, Ganzach, Flumin-Granat and Zigman, 2010; Trope and Neter, 1994).

Ashford (1986) defined uncertainty as a state where a person has little, no, or inconsistent information about a situation he or she is interested in. In this study it was found that managers are likely to seek feedback when they have little, or no, or inconsistent information about their knowledge and skills, and understanding of their functions, the right approach to deliver their functions and hence the potential outcome of their solutions to achieving organisational goals. Managers would be less likely to seek feedback if they are certain about the appropriate knowledge and skills, the right approach to deliver their function, and clear about the potential outcome of their solutions to organisational goals. Thus, the findings also

elaborate Ashford's (1986) 'uncertainty situation', and are consonant with the feedback seeking - uncertainty reduction proposition. Further, the findings are consistent with Berlyne's (1960) theory of uncertainty and choice which suggests a positive relationship between feelings of uncertainty and the propensity to seek information.

Also, the findings are consistent with laboratory studies which show that people are more likely to seek feedback about more difficult tasks (Eden, Ganzach, Flumin-Granat and Zigman, 2010; Trope and Neter, 1994). As the study showed, perceived difficulty is a situation in the managerial domain where a function is seen as complex, dynamic, unique, and novel. Such functions involve problem solutions, judgments and decision making, and require new ideas and experiences for effective delivery. Functions considered critical to achieving organisational goals, which could have implications for a person's career advancement are also perceived to be difficult. As a result of the complexities associated with difficult functions, managers are likely to seek feedback on such tasks for the appropriate information that would enhance their performance. Managers are likely to seek feedback from sources that will give them useful ideas and knowledge to enable them to perform their functions effectively. By contrast, managers are less likely to seek feedback about their performance when they perceive their functions as straightforward and less complex. Thus, feedback seeking is likely to increase with perceived difficulty of a managerial function.

The model suggests that perceived uncertainties could lead to perceived difficulties in managerial functions. On the other hand, perceived uncertainties could result from perceived difficulties. In either of these situations, managers are more likely to seek feedback for information that will help them to improve their performance by developing their skills. Managerial work is essentially, inherently complex and ambiguous as a result of the variety of roles relevant to their jobs the presence of multiple constituencies and the organisations' dependence on the subjective judgments of their members when assessing managerial performance (Mintzberg, 1975). The complexity makes it difficult to specify precisely what managers should do at any point in time (Ashford and Tsui, 1991), suggesting role complexity and uncertainty link. The complexity and ambiguity of managerial roles that make it difficult to understand and specify precisely what to do was expressed by participants. Therefore, they will be more likely seek feedback for information to reduce uncertainties for performance improvement. This is consistent with the suggestion that perceived low performance leads to higher feedback seeking (Fedor et al., 1992) and consequently skill development for performance improvement

Skill or self-development is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge that will enhance the understanding of the complexities of managerial functions, delivery of the functions including good judgments and decision making, and performance improvement. The findings suggest that managers are more likely to seek feedback if they perceive that by doing so, they will get useful information that can be used to enhance or develop their skills and capability for performance improvement. On the other hand, they are unlikely to seek feedback if they feel that they are well equipped for their jobs, and perceive that feedback would not provide them with any useful information for skill development and performance improvement.

The model suggests coherent links between self-efficacy, skill development, feedback and performance in a self regulatory process than previously thought. Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests relationships between feedback, self- efficacy, skill development and performance in a self regulation process perhaps in a more distal and remote fashion. The model provides support for the theoretical and empirical evidence which suggests relationships between feedback, self efficacy and performance (Bailey and Austin, 2006; Bandura and Cervone, 1986; Gist, 1987; Eden et al., 2010; Latham and Locke 1991; Maurer, Mitchell and Barbeite, 2002; Robertson and Sadri, 1993). According to the theories on performance outcomes, for

example goal setting theory (Latham and Locke 1991), self efficacy facilitates the self regulation process because of its effect on performance. Latham and Locke (1991) argued that in the context of goal setting, performance improvement in the self regulation process is related to feedback and self efficacy. In this perspective, according to the model proposed in this study, it is likely that when managers perceive uncertainties and difficulties in their functions (low self-efficacy) those who would be motivated to set difficult goals would see the need to develop their skills, and seek feedback for information on skills development and performance improvement. This is consistent with the theoretical proposition that self efficacy facilitates the self regulation process (Bandura, 1982) through skill development (Maurer et al., 2002), and performance improvement (Biron and Bamberger, 2010; Eden, et al., 2010; Robertson and Sadri, 1993; Staples, Hlland and Higgins, 1999). According to this explanation, managers who believe that they can improve their skills and abilities would be more likely to be motivated to reduce discrepancies, that is, perceived uncertainties and difficulties, by seeking feedback for information for the development of their skills, and for performance improvement. The higher one's self efficacy, the more likely it is that the person will engage and persist in task related behaviour (Chen and Bliese, 2002; Konic, Debus, Hausler, Lendenmann and Kleinmann, 2010).

Further, Bandura and Cervone (1986) found positive relationships between feedback, motivation and subsequent performance, and noted that feedback could be useful in formulating efficacy perceptions to enhance performance motivation. The feedback appears to be equivalent to guided mastery, which should lead to high efficacy and hence to high performance (Ivancevich and McMahon, 1982). In this study, the findings suggested that managers will seek feedback because it will reduce their perceived uncertainties and difficulties and provide them with useful knowledge and expertise that will enhance their capability and efficacy to enable them to improve their performance. Within the framework of the proposed model, managers with low self efficacy are likely to seek feedback to improve their capability and subsequent performance. This suggests that managers with high self efficacy are less likely to seek feedback because they will not need it for performance improvement. Gist (1987) had argued that a reciprocal relationship exists whereby performance feedback affects self efficacy, and self efficacy is also likely to affect feedback seeking, and had proposed the need for further research to describe the causal relationships between efficacy perceptions, feedback and subsequent performance. This study corroborates the evidence that self efficacy underlies feedback seeking behavior, and further proposes that it is a potential moderator of the feedback seeking process.

In short, the evidence from the current study in combination with the extant literature on self-efficacy, points to self efficacy as a potential explanation of the psychological process underlying managerial feedback seeking propensity in organisational setting. In this context, efficacy is defined in terms of perceived uncertainty or difficulty in dealing with a particular management situation and the need to seek feedback for self development. The higher the efficacy, the more they will be certain about their functions and will perceive fewer difficulties, the less likely they will be to seek feedback for skills development. The lower the efficacy, the less likely they will be certain about their functions perceive more difficulties, the more likely they will seek feedback for skills development.

### *6.1 Implications for Theory and Practice*

On a theoretical level, the study proposes a preliminary theoretical model which is consistent with the self regulation theories and arguably, offers a more coherent explanation of managers' feedback seeking propensities in organisations. The proposed model is a potential theoretical contender which postulates the centrality of perceived uncertainty and difficulty in a managerial situation, self development and self-efficacy in a self regulation framework, as explaining managers' feedback seeking process in organisational settings.

The study has important practical and organisational implications. It shows the importance self-efficacy perceptions in the development of skills and performance improvement within a managerial self regulation framework in an organisational context. It is incumbent for organizations to create favourable feedback environment that will promote feedback seeking among managers who feel ill-equipped to take a self-regulatory responsibility to develop their skills for performance improvement to achieve organizational goals.

#### *6.2 Limitations, Recommendation for Future Research and Conclusion*

A small sample size might affect the empirical generalisability of the findings. However in qualitative in-depth interviews a sample size of ten is considered adequate and acceptable for theoretical conclusions to be drawn (Cassel and Symon, 1994). Moreover, in grounded theory, the most important canon is the concept of 'theoretical saturation' or 'theoretical completeness' of the theory or conceptual model generated rather than the sample size of the study. 'Theoretical saturation,' supercedes sample size- which may be very small (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001). The study and the preliminary model provide starting point for empirically testing for relationships between perceived uncertainties, perceived difficulties, self development and feedback seeking in managerial situations, with self-efficacy as potential moderating variable in the relationships, particularly in local organizational contexts.

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