TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK? ENTREPRENEURS' AMBIDEXTROUS FEEDBACK SEEKING

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ABSTRACT

Feedback seeking seems ubiquitous in entrepreneurship. It is assumed to aid entrepreneurs in navigating the uncertainty associated with starting new ventures, innovating, and making fast strategic decisions. Yet our understanding of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is under-theorised as it is often only vaguely described as a single act to gain information. Additionally, puzzling findings, such as that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback, despite its potential benefits, are unexplained. This doctoral thesis represents an in-depth inductive study with 37 nascent social entrepreneurs to better understand why, why not, how, and with what consequences entrepreneurs seek feedback. The data informed a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence. The model captures the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, and consequences of feedback seeking. It illuminates feedback seeking not as a simple, trivial, and rational action, but as a dynamic and complex process that involves paradoxical goals that simultaneously drive entrepreneurs to seek and not to seek feedback to address a range of self-, venture-, and other-oriented concerns. Entrepreneurs effectively manage this paradox with an ambidextrous approach to pursue diverse goals by combining and switching between different strategies. These findings advance our current understanding of feedback seeking among individuals at work, both entrepreneurs and employees, and provide practical insights for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship support organisations. Additionally, they enrich the broader entrepreneurship literature in relation to micro-foundations, hybridity in social entrepreneurship, communities of inquiry, and close social ties, as well as paradox theory.

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CHAPTER ONE: THESIS OVERVIEW.

When I started developing Bloomberg, I wanted feedback. So every morning I'd arrive at the deli across the street from Merrill Lynch's headquarters at six a.m. and buy coffee (with and without milk) and tea (with and without milk), plus a few sugars on the side. I'd go up and roam the halls looking to see if there happened to be somebody sitting in their office alone reading a newspaper. I'd walk in and say, "Hi, I'm Mike Bloomberg, I bought you a cup of coffee. I'd just like to bend your ear."

Michael Bloomberg

In May 2014 Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Twitter and CEO of Square, emailed his 800 employees at Square asking them for feedback. He asked them to share anything they thought was important and in particular "where I've done well, where I've done poorly, and where I've completely screwed things up" (Carr, 2014). This email to answer the question "How am I doing?" exemplifies interpersonal feedback seeking as an entrepreneur's deliberate interaction with others to determine if goals are achieved or how to achieve them (building on Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983).

Entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking seems ubiquitous in entrepreneurship theories and phenomena. Entrepreneurs seek feedback from co-founders, employees, (potential) customers, partners, and other entrepreneurs (Corner & Wu, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989; Gemmell, Boland & Kolb, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015; Volery, Mueller & Siemens, 2015). They seek feedback when innovating (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015), navigating the uncertainty of creating new ventures (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008), attracting first customers, commercialising new technology (Corner & Wu, 2012), and making fast strategic decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Overall, interpersonal feedback seeking is suggested to improve individual performance (Frese, 2007; 2009) and aid venture emergence (Katre & Salipante, 2012).

While feedback seeking is portrayed as an essential interaction for entrepreneurs, it also seems to be too unremarkable to study on its own. Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is often examined as a part of broader theories, such as effectuation (Corner & Wu, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001), or processes, such as innovation (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015). However, this approach focuses on only positive outcomes and portrays interpersonal feedback seeking as a simple, vague, and functionalist action to gain new information that just happens, without providing details about how exactly entrepreneurs seek feedback. Additionally, evidence suggests that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre & Salipante, 2012). This is a puzzling finding, given the expected benefits, which suggests a potentially dark side of feedback seeking. This puzzle raises questions about what motivates entrepreneurs to seek and not to seek feedback. Are there any potential negative outcomes or challenges that motivate entrepreneurs to refrain from seeking feedback? This puzzle also challenges the current assumption that feedback seeking is beneficial for venture emergence (Katre & Salipante, 2012). Overall, the current state of knowledge on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is under-developed missing the essential theoretical elements: why and how a phenomenon occurs (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989). As an emerging stream of research, entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking lacks a theoretical foundation that can address these gaps and puzzling findings as well as provide directions for future research. Yet conceptualising feedback seeking can contribute to the emerging research programme of micro-foundations of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2015) and the entrepreneurial method (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011). Therefore, the research questions guiding this doctoral thesis are:

Research question 1: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback?*

Research question 2: *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?*

Research question 3: *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?*

To address these research questions, I employed an inductive theory building approach with data from 37 nascent social entrepreneurs. The data informed an emergent model that challenges portrayals of interpersonal feedback seeking as a simple and trivial action. It does so by conceptualising feedback seeking as a dynamic and complex process to address self-, venture-, and other-oriented concerns through proactively seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback. This model outlines the paradoxical tensions between conflicting, yet interrelated feedback-seeking goals that entrepreneurs pursue and distills their use of eight feedback-seeking strategies (including refraining from seeking feedback) to address these tensions. The model captures the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, an overall ambidextrous approach, and consequences of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. This model advances and challenges our current understanding of feedback seeking among individuals at work, both entrepreneurs and employees, and provides practical insights for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship support organisations. Taking a step back from the specific phenomenon of work-related feedback seeking, this doctoral thesis also contributes to the broader entrepreneurship literature in insightful ways related to the hybrid nature of social entrepreneurship, the nature of entrepreneurship micro-foundations, communities of inquiry, and the role of close social ties.

The following chapters of this thesis outline the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the research and detail the findings, emergent model, and implications for our understanding of (entrepreneurs') feedback seeking, (social) entrepreneurship more broadly, and for practice. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literatures involving interpersonal feedback seeking and conflicting demands to ground the research questions guiding this study. Chapter Three outlines the inductive approach undertaken, including the research context, data collection, management, and analysis methods and techniques used in the study. Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven detail the emergent findings in relation to development and protection

goals as a paradox, strategies in response to the feedback-seeking paradox, feedback-seeking enablers, and venture emergence as a trigger and a consequence of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking. Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by integrating the emergent findings into a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence and provides a thorough discussion of the findings and their implications for theory, future empirical work, and entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship support organisations.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEWS OF RELEVANT LITERATURES.

2.1. Introduction

This chapter grounds the research questions guiding this doctoral thesis in the relevant literatures in entrepreneurship, employees' feedback seeking in organisational behaviour, and paradox theory. It introduces entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon and discusses social entrepreneurship as a specific type of entrepreneurial activity. Next, I discuss the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship, such as actions, interactions, relationships, and cognition, and their importance for entrepreneurship research and practice. As one specific micro-foundation, interpersonal feedback seeking seems to be ubiquitous in entrepreneurship phenomena and argued to be essential for entrepreneurs, yet there is also emerging evidence that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback. Despite its importance for entrepreneurs, the reasons *why entrepreneurs seek feedback and why they refrain from seeking feedback* remain under-developed as fundamental elements of this micro-foundation, which poses the first research question of this doctoral thesis. Next, I present contingency and paradox theories as two approaches that provide insights into how individuals cope with contradictory motivations, yet neither one of these theories specifies *how exactly entrepreneurs seek feedback,* which is the second research question of this doctoral thesis. Building on the potential motivations to refrain from seeking feedback, which challenge the assumption that feedback seeking is beneficial for venture emergence, the chapter calls for a better understanding of *how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relates to venture emergence.*

2.2. Defining entrepreneurship

As a scholarly domain, entrepreneurship has its historic roots in economic activity. For the purposes of this doctoral thesis, I define entrepreneurship as identifying, developing, and exploiting

opportunities for new economic activity (based on Davidsson, 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), whereby opportunities represent market imperfections (Welter, Mauer & Wuebker, forthcoming). This definition remains close to the historical roots of the entrepreneurship concept in economic theory (Bull & Willard, 1993), which conceptualises entrepreneurship as the introduction of new economic activity that changes the marketplace. Such new economic activity can be the creation of a new market, a new product or service, a new production method, a new source of resources, or the reorganisation of an industry performed by a new or established venture. Introducing new economic activity is considered beneficial because it discovers and addresses inefficiencies in the economy by transforming resources into more valuable forms, thus advancing the economy as a whole (Schumpeter, 1961). Therefore, from an economic perspective, entrepreneurship is concerned with creating value through production and consumption. Additionally, entrepreneurship is associated with other positive economic outcomes, such as job creation, productivity growth, and production and commercialisation of high-quality innovations (van Praag & Versloot, 2007). However, the adopted definition does not make assumptions about the outcomes of this new economic activity. This means that the definition allows for the examination of less traditional and mainstream types of entrepreneurship, such as social entrepreneurship, which is concerned with pursuing social objectives.

2.2.1. Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is an emerging sub-field of research in entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010) and the empirical setting for this thesis because it is appropriate for investigating entrepreneurship research questions related to uncertainty and complexity. Given the emerging state of the field, for the purposes of this doctoral thesis, I adopt a broad definition of social entrepreneurship as identifying, developing, and exploiting opportunities for new economic activity to pursue a social objective

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(based on Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Mair, Battilana & Cardenas, 2012; Perrini, Vurro & Costanzo, 2010; Wilson & Post, 2013). This definition is broad enough to accommodate different approaches (Bacq & Janssen, 2011), yet it encompasses both the entrepreneurial and social elements of the phenomenon. Additionally, this definition is agnostic of legal form as social entrepreneurship activities can be diverse in their legal structures, varying from for-profit ventures to charities, community trusts, community businesses, partnerships, co-operatives, unincorporated organisations, industrial and providence societies, and development trusts just in the United Kingdom (Shaw & Carter, 2007).

At the core of social entrepreneurship is the pursuit of a social objective through market mechanisms. Commercial entrepreneurship activities contribute to social objectives, such as job creation and productivity growth (van Praag & Versloot, 2007), as a byproduct (Venkataraman, 1997). However, social entrepreneurship activities pursue social objectives as a primary or equally important goal (Mair & Martí, 2006). For example, social entrepreneurship activities have addressed a variety of social issues, such as drug addiction recovery (Perrini et al., 2010), homelessness (Tracey & Jarvis, 2007), poverty (Mair & Schoen, 2007), and high barriers to labour markets (Hockerts, 2015) across the globe. Research suggests that social entrepreneurs consider market mechanisms to be effective for addressing social needs for three main reasons. First, market mechanisms that generate economic value for the social venture are considered a self-sustaining and reliable approach to financing social change initiatives. Second, market mechanisms are considered a "giving a hand-up" instead of a "giving a hand-out" approach, thus enabling self-reliance for marginalised beneficiaries. Third, market participation by and success of social ventures are considered to pressure commercial ventures to change their practices and approaches to become more socially responsible (Wilson & Post, 2013).

A prominent example of social entrepreneurship as an economic activity to pursue a social objective is Grameen Bank.

Grameen Bank was founded in Bangladesh to provide microcredits, which are small, unsecured loans for starting or expanding a business, to the poorest rural individuals, predominantly women, who did not qualify for loans from traditional banks due to lack of collateral. Professor Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank, believed that affordable loans would be effective in reducing extreme poverty as well as improving health and education attainment levels. Grameen Bank developed a system that supported borrowers to repay their loans on time, thus ensuring the financial sustainability of the bank without relying on outside support, such as donations (Yunus, 1998). Profitable from the early stages, as of 2006, Grameen Bank had supported 6.6 million borrowers with an unprecedented repayment rate above 95% (Giridharadas & Bradsher, 2006). Grameen Bank, along with other similar organisations, sparked a global microfinance industry, which reached 205 million borrowers as of 2010 (Maes & Reed, 2012). A recent meta-analysis provides strong evidence that microcredits reduce poverty and increase nutrition, education, and female empowerment (Chliova, Brinckmann & Rosenbusch, 2015).

As social entrepreneurship is the pursuit of a social objective through market mechanisms, it combines both social and entrepreneurial dimensions.

2.2.1.1. Social dimensions of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is explicitly and implicitly social in multiple ways, which are more commonly associated with the not-for-profit sector than with commercial entrepreneurship. The most obvious social element of social entrepreneurship is the explicit pursuit of a social objective as a raison d'etre. Common social objectives that social entrepreneurs pursue relate to economic, civic engagement, law and rights, environmental, education, health, food, housing, technology, culture, and family issues. Common beneficiaries of social entrepreneurship are communities, civic engagement organisations, the public, children, farmers, women, youth, families, teachers, disabled individuals, people living in

poverty or who are homeless, students, governments, and businesses (Mair et al., 2012). Social entrepreneurship activities can vary in scale and scope as they can address specific local community needs, build and institutionalise alternative national structures to address social needs, and build lasting structures to challenge the status quo globally (Zahra et al., 2009). Additionally, research highlights that implicitly embedded in social entrepreneurship are antecedents, processes, and outcomes that are other-focused or cooperative in nature.

Other-oriented emotions, values, and dispositions at the individual and venture levels of analysis can be antecedents of social entrepreneurship. First, other-oriented emotions can encourage social entrepreneurship. Emotions, such as compassion and empathy, can direct individuals' attention toward concern for others and their suffering. Such emotions can increase the desirability of and commitment to engaging in social entrepreneurship (Hockerts, 2015; Miller et al., 2012; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2015) and enhance cognitive processes beneficial for engaging in a complex and challenging endeavour such as social entrepreneurship (Miller et al., 2012). Second, other-oriented values can encourage social entrepreneurship. For example, social obligation as individuals' belief that society is morally obliged to support marginalised groups is associated with the desirability of social entrepreneurship (Hockerts, 2015).

Other-oriented individual values can be applied to the venture. Caring for others can be conceptualised as a disposition of the venture, not just an attribute of social entrepreneurs. A caring venture disposition is argued to help scaling social ventures maintain their commitment to the social objective. It is suggested that a caring social venture ensures everyone in and around the venture is cared for, thus the whole venture is concerned with others and acts in ways to benefit others. To build a caring venture when scaling, social entrepreneurs can foster care in all members of the venture, encourage caring relationships among venture members, and develop the venture's capacity to seek and listen to the ideas,

experiences, and suggestions of different stakeholders (André & Pache, 2014).

Cooperative and collective processes that bring a variety of individuals and organisations together are embedded in social entrepreneurship. Overall, social entrepreneurs actively involve diverse stakeholders in the creation, management, and governance of social ventures (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010). Engaging with and bringing together diverse individuals and organisations seem to be essential for pursuing social objectives as they aid the development and distribution of new offerings and provide access to resources and institutional support. For example, when social ventures develop new opportunities, they seem to involve multiple actors from the community because they possess different knowledge needed for the implementation of new opportunities (Corner & Ho, 2010), can provide tangible resources, and increase the visibility and credibility of the social venture (Perrini et al., 2010). Social ventures also seem to create diverse value networks early on (Mair & Schoen, 2007) and leverage partnerships with charities and businesses to access distribution channels (Hockerts, 2015). Such stakeholder participation (Di Domenico et al., 2010) and "community" or "collective" involvement (Shaw & Carter, 2007) can even be embedded in the governance structures of social ventures by including community and beneficiary representatives in steering committees, management groups, and boards (Shaw & Carter, 2007; Di Domenico et al., 2010). Collective processes that bring diverse stakeholders together not only aid the pursuit of the venture's social objective, but also establish cooperation and goodwill, thus enhancing cooperative norms within society (Estrin, Mickiewicz & Stephan, 2013).

2.2.1.2. Entrepreneurial dimensions of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship research suggests that social entrepreneurs and social ventures adopt approaches, methods, processes, and perceptions similar to those in commercial entrepreneurship. Not only do social ventures leverage market

mechanisms, but they also engage in activities and approaches used by commercial entrepreneurs. Theoretical work supports this argument by applying traditional entrepreneurship models, reviewing the literature, and comparing different types of entrepreneurship (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010; Lumpkin et al., 2013). Empirical research also provides support for this argument. First, entrepreneurship approaches, such as effectuation, causation, and bricolage, initially developed through research in commercial entrepreneurship, have also been studied in social entrepreneurship (Corner & Ho, 2010, Desa, 2012; Di Domenico et al., 2010). Second, social ventures demonstrate similar operational process in managing resources (Meyskens et al., 2010) and leverage similar scaling methods when lacking resources, such as franchising (Tracey & Jarvis, 2007), as commercial ventures. Third, social entrepreneurs seem to engage in networking activities for many of the same reasons as commercial entrepreneurs, for example to acquire information, identify opportunities, and access resources and support (Shaw & Carter, 2007). Fourth, there seem to be similarities at the beginning of the entrepreneurship process as well. For example, social and commercial entrepreneurs demonstrate similar levels of fear of failure and perceive business opportunities at similar rates (Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn, 2016).

Ultimately, social entrepreneurship research can help us understand entrepreneurship more broadly. The similarities of approaches, methods, processes, and perceptions between social and commercial entrepreneurship suggest that social entrepreneurship can serve as a specific context to study entrepreneurship (Dacin et al., 2010). While social entrepreneurship may pose specific challenges for both social ventures and social entrepreneurs, it can also provide valuable insights for the broader entrepreneurship field. Social entrepreneurship as a research context can be particularly appropriate for investigating research questions concerned with or influenced by uncertainty, which is one of the cornerstones of entrepreneurship (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), and

complexity because they are enhanced in social entrepreneurship due to the hybrid nature of the phenomenon, which I discuss next.

2.2.1.3. Hybridity in social entrepreneurship and its risks

Considering its social and entrepreneurial dimensions, social entrepreneurship is a phenomenon of hybridity, which brings risks for social entrepreneurs and social ventures. Hybridity is broadly conceptualised as combining elements from multiple social domains or organisational forms. In the context of social entrepreneurship, hybridity is often understood as the combination of different institutional logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Institutional logics are broadly defined as a social domain's organising principles (Friedland & Alford, 1991) or rules of the game (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). They are taken-for-granted social prescriptions and templates that convey shared understanding of what is considered legitimate and acceptable in terms of goals, organising forms, and practices in a distinct social domain (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012). For example, not-for-profit organisations are guided by a development or social welfare logic which emphasises a mission to help disadvantaged groups, cooperation, and interaction with a diverse range of stakeholders to gain support, resources, and influence authorities. On the other hand, a market logic, which emphasises profit maximisation and competition, guides commercial ventures. Overall, institutional logics influence and constrain individuals and organisations in a given field in terms of activities, structures, processes, and meanings. Social entrepreneurship is a phenomenon of hybridity because it combines social welfare and market logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty, Haugh & Lyon, 2014). This hybridity is evident at the venture and individual levels of analysis.

The hybridity embedded in social entrepreneurship is evident at the venture level of analysis. Social ventures are by definition hybrids as they use market mechanisms to pursue social objectives (Austin et al., 2006; Mair et al., 2012; Perrini et al., 2010; Wilson & Post, 2013). For example, Grameen Bank uses microloans to eradicate

extreme poverty and improve health and education attainment (Yunus, 1998). This hybridity is also evident in the broad approaches of creating and managing social ventures in situations of uncertainty and resource constraints. For example, social ventures are created and scaled up through established entrepreneurship approaches, such as causation, effectuation (Corner & Ho, 2010), and bricolage (Di Domenico et al., 2010) as well as through engaging in cooperation (Corner & Ho, 2010) and stakeholder participation (Di Domenico et al., 2010), which are more common for not-for-profit organisations. Finally, the hybridity of social entrepreneurship is evident in the combination of financing strategies social ventures employ. Not only do social ventures engage in economic activities to earn income, but they also rely on other traditionally commercial sources of financing, such as venture capital (Miller & Wesley, 2010). Additionally, they rely on traditionally not-for-profit sources of financing, such as venture philanthropy (Hockerts, 2006), voluntary workforce, grants, donations, and subsidies (Bacq, Hartog & Hoogendoorn, 2013).

The hybridity embedded in social entrepreneurship is also evident at the individual level of analysis. First, research suggests that successful nascent social entrepreneurs combine behaviours common for not-for-profit and commercial leaders (Katre & Salipante, 2012). Second, nascent social entrepreneurs and employees in social ventures can combine values embedded in the social welfare and commercial logics. In the context of starting new social ventures, theoretical work differentiates between individuals with identities that combine values from both the social welfare and commercial logics and single-minded entrepreneurs whose identities align with only one logic (Wry & York, 2015). Theoretical and empirical work suggests that employees in social ventures can also have hybrid identities. Whether they are called pluralists (Besharov, 2014) or multicultural individuals (Pache & Santos, 2015), such employees identify with values common to multiple logics. Such hybrid employees not only accept the competing institutional logics within the social venture, but they can also build bridges and foster acceptance between

individuals with single identities (Besharov, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2015). Individuals' hybridity may be influenced by their personal values (Besharov, 2014), previous experience in both the not-for-profit and commercial sectors (Battilana et al., 2013; Wry & York, 2015), or socialisation processes within the social venture (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Battilana et al., 2013).

Dealing with multiple institutional logics is challenging for both social ventures and social entrepreneurs. If institutional logics represent the rules of the game (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) then combining multiple institutional logics means that social entrepreneurs and social ventures play multiple games which may not necessarily follow the same rules and reward the same actions. As social ventures combine multiple institutional logics, they face tensions and contradictions (Smith, Gonin & Besharov, 2013), challenges to legitimacy (Pache & Santos, 2013), difficulties to access resources, and internal conflict among venture members (for reviews see Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). These challenges can have significant negative effects on social ventures as they can make it difficult to operate effectively (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) and maintain desirable levels of productivity (Battilana et al., 2013). These negative effects can also be seen in nascent social ventures, which are less likely to become operational compared to commercial ventures (Renko, 2013).

Legitimacy can be a challenge for both social ventures and social entrepreneurs as individuals. Legitimacy is a "generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, 547). Thus, legitimacy stems from following the rules of the game established by institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and makes organisations seem "natural and meaningful", which enhances access to resources (Suchman, 1995). However, as social ventures combine multiple institutional logics, they may struggle to establish legitimacy in both fields (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Galaskiewicz & Barringer, 2012; Pache & Santos, 2010). They may be perceived as

too commercial by the social field and not commercial enough by the commercial field (Galaskiewicz & Barringer, 2012) because organisational outcomes can be defined as both success and failure (Jay, 2013). The legitimacy of the social venture can also influence the individual entrepreneur because it may have implications for how he/she is perceived by others (Pache & Santos, 2015). Given the collective nature of social ventures, social entrepreneurs seem to use their personal contacts and networks to gain support for and launch the social venture, thus risking their personal reputation (Shaw & Carter, 2007), which is the perception of high esteem and regard others have of the entrepreneur (Roberts, 2005; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). This is why social ventures attempt to construct their image and gain legitimacy with their actions and rhetoric (Pache & Santos, 2013; Ruebottom, 2013).

In summary, social entrepreneurship is a hybrid phenomenon, which combines elements of the not-for-profit and commercial sectors. The hybridity of social entrepreneurship poses challenges and dangers for both social ventures and social entrepreneurs. It introduces additional levels of complexity and uncertainty to the entrepreneurial endeavour, thus hindering entrepreneurs' ability to predict the probability of future events (Milliken, 1987). This hybridity is also essential for the pursuit of social objectives in a sustainable manner (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Battilana et al., 2013). Yet, social entrepreneurs and social ventures adopt approaches, methods, processes, and perceptions similar to those in commercial entrepreneurship (see Section 2.2.1.2. in this chapter), which allows for the theorising of the entrepreneurship phenomenon more broadly based on research with social entrepreneurs or social ventures. From this perspective, social ventures, similarly to high-technology ventures provide extreme uncertainty, which can be useful for generating insights and lessons for entrepreneurship research in general. Therefore, social entrepreneurship is a theoretically interesting context to study entrepreneurs' actions and interactions in relation to uncertainty, complexity, and legitimacy, such as feedback seeking. Such a focus on actions and interactions as the micro-

foundations of entrepreneurship is an emerging stream of research, which I turn to next.

2.3. Toward micro-foundations of entrepreneurship

Developing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities requires action (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), yet the focus on the actions of entrepreneurs is only emerging as a stream of research. Because of the economic heritage of entrepreneurship as a discipline, research has investigated the outcomes of entrepreneurship and portrayed entrepreneurs as rational and isolated economic agents (e.g. Minniti & Lévesque, 2008). However, new economic activities, whether they are new offerings, ventures, or markets, do not simply emerge. They are created through actions and interactions as entrepreneurs engage in a process of turning an idea into an operational offering or venture (Dimov, 2010; McMullen & Dimov, 2013). For example, when launching new ventures, entrepreneurs engage in activities, such as starting marketing efforts, registering the venture, creating a website (e.g. Davidsson & Honig, 2003). However, such actions and interactions are often assumed as given and not examined, yet they are among the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2015).

Micro-foundations generally explain how collective phenomena are developed, reproduced, and managed through lower-level entities (Barney & Felin, 2013; Felin et al., 2012). In entrepreneurship research a micro-foundational perspective considers how actions, interactions, relationships, and cognition contribute to collective givens, such as venture emergence (Shepherd 2015; van Burg & Romme, 2014). In other words, micro-foundations represent the fine-grained elements that make up the broad entrepreneurship process, thus explaining "the macro by focusing on the micro, rather than taking the former for granted" (Barney & Felin, 2013, 145). Ultimately, micro-foundations depict a transparent process or structure that explicates why and how an outcome occurs in particular context (van Burg & Romme, 2014).

Similar to developments in strategic management (Abell et al., 2008), recent calls have emphasised the importance of breaking down the entrepreneurship process into its constituent actions and interactions to build the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship and advance the field. First, entrepreneurship scholars are advocating for more fine-grained research into the actions of entrepreneurs. While the notion that entrepreneurship requires action is undisputed (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), there is still a lack of understanding about what exactly entrepreneurs do, what actions they engage in to identify, develop, and exploit opportunities (Bird, Schjoedt & Baum, 2012; Davidsson, 2003; Shepherd, 2015; Wright & Marlow, 2012). Second, recognising that entrepreneurs are not isolated economic agents, more research is required to understand how entrepreneurs involve and interact with others to identify, develop, and exploit opportunities (Shepherd, 2015).

Developing the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship is important for both research and practice. First, without negating a macro approach, a micro-foundational approach can contribute to a more complete picture of the entrepreneurship process by examining entrepreneurs' actions and interactions, which are often taken for granted (Venkataraman, et al., 2012). Building the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship can allow us to understand and predict how different outcomes in different contexts can be produced (van Burg & Romme, 2014), which is important given the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship (Davidsson, 2003). Second, a micro-foundational approach can contribute to the development of the entrepreneurial method, which also emphasises research into entrepreneurs' actions and interactions to enable individuals to act in entrepreneurial ways (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011).

A micro-foundational approach to entrepreneurship is gaining momentum. Adopting a top-down approach to examine the micro-foundations of a single phenomenon, scholars have focused on the fine-grained actions and interactions of entrepreneurs when developing dynamic capabilities in the context of technology commercialisation (Corner & Wu, 2012) and when engaging in both

radical and incremental innovation (Volery, Mueller & von Siemens, 2015), to name a few. One micro-foundation that seems to be ubiquitous, yet under-developed in entrepreneurship is feedback seeking. I turn to feedback seeking next.

2.4. Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as a micro-foundation

An important micro-foundation of entrepreneurship seems to be interpersonal feedback seeking, which I define as an entrepreneur's deliberate interpersonal interaction with others to determine if goals are achieved or how to achieve them (building on Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). In this definition of feedback seeking, I do not refer to long-term goals related to the expected profitability of entrepreneurial opportunities, but to short- and medium-term goals related to creating, leading, and managing a venture effectively. Goals may exist in hierarchies at different levels, for example daily action goals, long-term wishes or life goals, or strategic goals for the venture (Frese, 2007). Entrepreneurs may not always have clear goals about the final design of their product, service or business model (e.g. Sarasvathy, 2001), but they have goals that drive their everyday actions (Baum & Locke, 2004; Gielnik et al., 2015; Glaub et al., 2014).

Entrepreneurs value feedback (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015) because it is evaluative information that helps them to improve their decision making (Haynie, Shepherd & Patzelt, 2012) and correct errors (Frese, 2007; 2009). Past research has emphasised market feedback whereby venture creation is a feedback-driven process as entrepreneurs respond to signals from the market (Bhave, 1994). Entrepreneurs receive market feedback in the form of demand as well as from launching product prototypes, piloting services, and changing business models (Andries, Debackere & Van Looy, 2013; Baum & Bird, 2010).

This perspective of generating and using market feedback is embedded not only in scholarly work, but also in practice-oriented

entrepreneurship literatures, particularly lean start-up (Ries, 2011) and design thinking (Brown, 2008; 2009). The lean start-up methodology has its roots in manufacturing and IT. It is a principled iterative approach to creating new ventures that adopts a build-measure-learn feedback loop. At the core of the approach is the development of a minimal viable product (or a prototype) that is released to the market, thus allowing the entrepreneur to test core assumptions, such as the desirability of the product and the viability of the business model. Any market feedback received is then used to make refinements to the product and/or the business model of the venture (Honig & Hopp, 2016; Ries, 2011). Design thinking, which has its roots in design practice, is a similar iterative approach adopted by entrepreneurs and innovation teams. The methodology puts users in the centre of the process through extensive user research and development of product prototypes or service pilots with various degree of fidelity. Similarly to lean start-up, any feedback from prototype or pilot testing is then used to refine the end product or service (Brown, 2008; 2009; Katre, 2016).

Both academic and practice-oriented literatures emphasise that the feedback received from the market through direct entry or active experimentation is focused on whether the developed offering is desirable for customers or users (Andries et al., 2013; Bhave, 1994; Brown, 2008; 2009; Ries, 2011). However, such market feedback has limitations. First, it arrives in the later stages of the creation process when changes are more expensive, resources have been invested to create artefacts, and routines have been developed (Andries et al., 2013). Second, market feedback includes only the perspective of customers or users and focuses only on the creation of a desired offering. However, entrepreneurs have multiple, overlapping, mutually dependent, and competing goals on personal and venture levels. For example, beyond feedback on the offering of their venture, they may also need feedback on how they manage employees. Third, market feedback is passively received through a one-way channel and it limits the entrepreneur's learning opportunities because it does not allow for interaction and

elaboration to enhance feedback. Fourth, market feedback is only a fraction of the feedback entrepreneurs receive and recent empirical studies show that entrepreneurs proactively seek feedback through interpersonal interactions (Fisher, 2012; Gemmell et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012).

A complementary emerging perspective on feedback in entrepreneurship considers entrepreneurs as proactive and social in their feedback processes by engaging in interpersonal feedback seeking. Entrepreneurs seek feedback through interactions with different individuals, such as co-founders (Gemmell et al., 2012), employees (Volery et al., 2015), experts and community leaders (Katre & Salipante, 2012), prospective and early customers (Corner & Wu, 2012; Fisher, 2012), and other entrepreneurs in the same industry (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). This perspective portrays feedback seeking as a proactive two-directional interaction between an entrepreneur and at least one feedback source (i.e. the individual providing feedback). This interaction is initiated by the entrepreneur and can focus not just on the offering, but on any personal or venture topic relevant to the role of the entrepreneur. Thus, interpersonal feedback seeking[1] is important for entrepreneurs because it complements the market feedback they receive in terms of timeliness and content and gives them more control in initiating the feedback process.

2.4.1. Feedback seeking in entrepreneurship research

An exhaustive consideration of this emerging scholarly perspective on entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking identifies such interactions in entrepreneurship theories and processes, albeit not always explicitly referred to as "feedback seeking". Theoretical approaches, such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001), bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012), and action-

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[1] For the rest of this thesis I use "feedback seeking" to refer exclusively to interpersonal feedback seeking, which is the focus of this doctoral research. Any references to "market feedback" use the term explicitly to differentiate it from interpersonal feedback seeking.

regulation theory (Frese, 2007; 2009), implicitly or explicitly suggest that feedback seeking is one of the important activities for entrepreneurs. Effectuation and bricolage are two closely related entrepreneurship theories that implicitly embed feedback seeking. On a fine-grained level, feedback seeking fits the co-creative and interactive sprit of effectuation and bricolage and represents a specific way of how entrepreneurs involve others. Effectuation is a decision-making logic used by entrepreneurs in environments of uncertainty whereby they interact with others and involve customers as partners early in the process. For example, entrepreneurs may expose draft products to potential customers to seek feedback. This provides entrepreneurs with feedback about the desirability of their offerings by customers who are not interested in the offering or feedback that confirms decisions or provides suggestions and new ideas from customers who make pre-commitments (Read et al., 2016; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). From this theoretical perspective, feedback seeking aids entrepreneurs to cope with the uncertainty of creating new ventures, which is one of the fundamental aspects of entrepreneurial action (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Bricolage is a theory of entrepreneurial action in resource-constrained environments. Bricolage adopts a similar approach as effectuation regarding interactions with others and proposes that one of the main ways entrepreneurs deal with resource scarcity is by involving "customers, suppliers and hangers-on" in providing labour (Baker & Nelson, 2005). While labour may be conceptualised in a traditional way, it can also include providing feedback, new ideas, and suggestions, which can be seen in ideational bricolage (Desa & Basu, 2012).

Emerging evidence supports the argument that feedback seeking is embedded in effectuation and bricolage. Fisher's (2012) comparison of the fine-grained behaviours of entrepreneurs shows that when entrepreneurs engage in effectuation and bricolage, they share information about their products and crude solutions with blog readers and existing users to get feedback. A similar approach of sharing new technologies with potential customers and getting their

feedback is evident in the process of gaining first customers and developing capabilities during technology commercialisation (Corner & Wu, 2012).

In contrast to effectuation and bricolage, action-regulation theory is a more planned and rational approach to entrepreneurial action, which explicitly addresses feedback seeking. Action-regulation theory sees entrepreneurs as taking an active approach to learning and experimentation to improve their performance and achieve their goals. This involves engagement in an iterative cycle of planning, action to execute plans, managing errors in execution, and seeking feedback (Frese, 2007; 2009). Despite their differences, effectuation, bricolage, and action-regulation theory share aspects related to feedback seeking and can be adopted in different situations or selectively in different domains (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Reyman et al., 2015; Sarasvathy, 2001).

Feedback seeking is also embedded in fundamental entrepreneurship processes. The emerging research suggests that entrepreneurs seek feedback when refining opportunities, innovating, and making fast strategic decisions. Entrepreneurs arguably refine their opportunities by seeking feedback from "communities of inquiry" which represent potential stakeholders with standards, ideas, and needs relevant to the opportunity (Shepherd, 2015). Entrepreneurs seek feedback when generating and launching new ideas (Gemmell, et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012) as well as when balancing between radical and incremental innovation (Volery et al., 2015). They seek feedback when commercialising new technology and developing dynamic capabilities, which helps them to gain first customers (Corner & Wu, 2012) and turn early customers and users into advocates who promote the offering (Fisher, 2012). Entrepreneurs also seek feedback to cope with uncertainty. They seek feedback from trusted and experienced executives about new products, alliances, and strategic directions when making fast strategic decisions in uncertain environments (Eisenhardt, 1989). In situations of increasing uncertainty, feedback seeking can also help

entrepreneurs to reduce the negative emotions (Collewaert et al., 2016).

Feedback seeking functions as an entrepreneurship micro-foundation. Feedback seeking's embeddedness in entrepreneurship theories and processes suggests that it contributes to higher-level phenomena, such as venture creation and innovation (Gemmell, et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Volery et al., 2015). Such embeddedness exemplifies the definition of micro-foundations as lower-level entities developing, reproducing, and managing collective phenomena (Barney & Felin, 2013; Felin et al., 2012). Additional support for this argument is provided by feedback seeking's relationship to performance. Theoretical work suggests that feedback seeking enhances the performance of entrepreneurs (Frese, 2007; 2009). Feedback seeking can also aid venture performance as venture emergence is an implicit outcome of feedback-seeking interactions (e.g. Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). Focusing on criticism as a type of feedback, research on seeking peer assistance demonstrates that seeking criticism of the design of e-commerce shops relates to perceived venture performance (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015).

The complementary nature of interpersonal feedback seeking to market feedback, its role as a micro-foundation of entrepreneurial action, and its assumed relationship with performance highlight the importance of feedback-seeking interactions for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship research. Despite its importance for research and practice, there are multiple blindspots on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, which I discuss next.

2.4.2. Blind spots on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking

Despite the emerging research interest in entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking, our understanding of the topic is naive and simplistic as it does not represent the complexities and contradictions that entrepreneurs face when seeking feedback due to several blindspots and under-developed areas. In addition to its

benefits, feedback seeking can also create contradictions for entrepreneurs. The emerging literature highlights that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre & Salipante, 2012). However, this is also a puzzling finding considering the suggested positive outcomes of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking for both entrepreneurs (Frese, 2007; 2009) and their ventures (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). One possible explanation for this puzzle is that entrepreneurs may experience conflicting motivations. For example, entrepreneurs are motivated to seek feedback from other entrepreneurs in the same industry because "the feedback I put the most weight on are those from fellow quilters" (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015, p. 578). However, they also give little feedback to peers and when participating in peer support networks others may be "blatantly stealing my designs, trade dress, branding etc." (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015, p. 578), which highlights the competitive nature of entrepreneurship and the motivation to protect uniqueness. Such expected negative outcomes of seeking feedback challenge the current assumption that feedback seeking is always beneficial for entrepreneurs and their ventures, particularly in relation to venture emergence (e.g. Katre & Salipnate, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008).

Why entrepreneurs seek feedback and why they do not is unclear because entrepreneurs' feedback seeking in under-theorised and under-researched. While entrepreneurs' feedback seeking seems ubiquitous, it also seems to be too obvious to research on its own, instead of as a component of other phenomena and processes. Even action-regulation theory, which explicitly refers to feedback seeking, does not outline the feedback-seeking process in detail. In fact Frese (2007) suggests that "feedback processes have been little studied in entrepreneurship" (p. 181). This view is supported by more recent research on (entrepreneurs') feedback seeking, which also highlights the limited understand of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking (e.g. Ashford, De Stobbeleir & Nujella, 2016; Collewaert et al., 2016).

Because entrepreneurs' feedback seeking so far has been examined as part of broad entrepreneurship theories and processes, it is usually vaguely described as a single act to gain information that

just happens (e.g. Sarasvathy, 2008; Volery et al., 2015). This approach suffers from several limitations. First, it does not explain why entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is embedded in diverse theories (e.g. Baker & Nelson, 2005, Desa & Basu, 2012; Frese, 2007; 2009; Sarasvathy, 2008) and processes (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989; Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015) and why exactly entrepreneurs seek feedback. Second, it does not offer an explanation for why entrepreneurs do not seek feedback. Do entrepreneurs refrain from seeking feedback because they face barriers that prevent them from seeking feedback? Or do entrepreneurs proactively choose not to seek feedback in light of recent research on proactive lack of action (Richetin, Conner & Perugini, 2011)? Third, more broadly, entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is portrayed only in relation to its instrumental value for the venture, particularly in relation to venture emergence (e.g. Katre & Salipnate, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). However, this rational approach ignores the personal and social elements of feedback seeking as an interpersonal phenomenon, which can have implications for the reasons to seek and not to seek feedback, as discussed in the next section. Overall, explicating why entrepreneurs seek and do not seek feedback can provide two of the building blocks of the transparent process that is required to examine feedback seeking as a micro-foundation in the future (van Burg & Romme, 2014).

Insights about some of the issues related to entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can be gained from the organisational behaviour literature, where employees' feedback seeking is an established stream of research. I turn to this body of literature next.

2.5. Employees' feedback seeking

While feedback seeking among entrepreneurs is just emerging as a topic of research, how frequently employees seek feedback has been under investigation in the organisational behaviour literature for more than 30 years (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). This stream of

research conceptualises that employees do not merely wait for their annual performance reviews to receive feedback, but also proactively seek upward feedback from superiors in immediate relational (e.g. LMX) or structural contexts (e.g. bonus systems, routinisation), and individual outcomes (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Ashford et al., 2016). A handful of studies also measure employees' feedback seeking from co-workers (Ashford, 1986; Callister, Krammer & Turban, 1999), peers in other departments, and peers in other organisations (De Stobbeleir, Ashford & Buyens, 2011). This stream of research investigates how personal (e.g. motives) and contextual antecedents (relational or organisational factors) influence the strategies and frequency with which employees seek feedback and the outcomes of feedback seeking for individuals (for reviews see Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2003; 2016; Morrison, 2002). While an exhaustive review of the feedback-seeking literature in organisational behaviour is beyond the scope of this entrepreneurship doctoral thesis, next I present the main elements of employees' feedback seeking (i.e. strategies, motives, and outcomes) as they can provide insights into some of the blindspots on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking identified in the previous section.

Employees can seek feedback with two different *strategies*. First, they can ask their supervisors or peers for feedback through a *direct inquiry*. Second, they can proactively *monitor* the environment for cues and interpret other individuals' behaviours and reactions as feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). For example, employees may consider the "performance behaviors your boss rewards and use this as feedback on your own performance" (Ashford, 1986, p. 487). A recent meta-analysis demonstrates that most studies use either only inquiry or do not specify the type of feedback-seeking behaviour, and only a few studies differentiate between inquiry and monitoring. This analysis shows that inquiry is a more effective strategy to seek feedback as it relates not only to an individual's job satisfaction, but also to his/her job performance. Additionally, the

overall cost/value framework adopted in feedback-seeking research has different implications for the two strategies (Anseel et al., 2015).

Whether and with what frequency employees seek feedback depends on a cost/value framework with three goals or motives: instrumental, ego and image management. Overall, employees value feedback seeking to pursue an instrumental goal (for reviews see Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford et al., 2003; Morrison, 2002) because feedback has a diagnostic function that can be beneficial in correcting errors, making adjustments, and reducing uncertainty. Employees appreciate the informational value of feedback to improve their personal performance through self-regulation and the more they value feedback, the more often they seek it (Anseel et al., 2015). This goal is particularly salient for individuals in new situations, such as organisational entry (Ashford & Black, 1996), career transitions (Callister, Kramer & Turban, 1999), and young managers (London, Larsen & Thisted, 1999), and those with little experience (Anseel et al., 2015). As the inquiry strategy to seek feedback provides more direct feedback, it is argued to be the preferred option in situations when employees value feedback greatly (Ashford et al., 2003). However, employees also pursue goals that are in conflict with the instrumental benefit and may be motivated to refrain from seeking feedback. They perceive feedback seeking as costly when they pursue goals of ego and image management, which may reduce the frequency of feedback seeking.

Whether and how employees seek feedback depends on an ego management goal. Ego management is individuals' motivation to enhance or maintain their self-image (Ashford et al., 2003) because how we see ourselves directs our motivations and actions (Bandura, 1997; Epstein, 1973). Feedback seeking can have positive and negative effects on one's ego because feedback is evaluative information (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). The ego management goal has two different aspects: maintenance of current self-views and enhancement of self-views (Chang & Swann, 2012; Hepper & Sedikides, 2012). When employees are concerned with coherence and certainty of their self-views, they are arguably more likely to seek

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feedback that matches their current self-concepts or take advantage of situations that will lead to such feedback, even if the expected feedback is negative. However, when employees are more concerned with enhancing their self-views, they are arguably more likely to seek positive feedback, take advantage of situations that will lead to positive feedback, and avoid feedback seeking when they expect the feedback to be negative (Hepper & Sedikides, 2012). Investigation of the ego management goal shows that individuals who are more concerned with ego defence (Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002) or have low self-efficacy (Anseel et al., 2015) seek less feedback. In situations of ego defence, the monitoring type of feedback seeking may be preferred by employees as it is less direct and depends on attentiveness, inference, and interpretation.

Whether and how employees seek feedback also depends on an image management goal. Image management is employees' motivation to present themselves to relevant others in a positive light (Ashford et al., 2003). The image management goal also has two different aspects: maintenance of current public image and enhancement of public image. On the one hand, seeking feedback may portray employees as weak and insecure or draw attention to their poor performance, thus damaging their image (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, Levy et al., 1995). The more employees are concerned with protecting their public image, the less feedback they seek (Hays & Williams, 2011; Tuckey et al., 2002). Employees also tend to seek less feedback in public situations (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Levy et al., 1995; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990; Tuckey et al., 2002). Theory suggests that when concerned with their public image, employees are more likely to prefer the monitoring type of feedback seeking as it is safer (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). However, employees may also seek feedback through inquiry to enhance their public image by drawing attention to positive outcomes and performance (Morrison & Bies, 1991). This argument is gaining initial support by empirical evidence that shows that employees sometimes seek feedback even when the value of the information is low (Moss, Valenzi & Taggart, 2003).

Based on how frequently employees seek feedback, research has identified several positive individual outcomes. First, employees who seek more feedback also engage in other workplace socialisation behaviours, such as building relationships, networking, and socialising (Anseel et al., 2015). Second, they exhibit more positive job attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Anseel et al., 2015) and use the feedback to set new goals (Renn & Fedor, 2001). Finally, employees who seek more feedback using the direct inquiry strategy perform better in general (Anseel et al., 2015) as well as in relation to creative tasks in particular (De Stobbeleir et al., 2011).

2.6. Toward the first research question

2.6.1. Comparing employees' and entrepreneurs' feedback seeking

The organisational behaviour literature argues that feedback seeking is a fundamental process for individuals facing new settings, working in uncertain environments, and pursuing diverse goals (Ashford et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs are the epitome of such individuals. Uncertainty is inherent in the venture creation process (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) and one of the main differentiators between entrepreneurship and other types of work (Baron, 2008; 2010). They pursue multiple goals with their entrepreneurial activities related to firm performance, workplace relationships, personal fulfilment, community impact, and personal financial rewards (Wach, Stephan & Gorgievski, 2015). While feedback seeking among employees is an established stream of organisational behaviour research, which considers entrepreneurship as a new context to study feedback seeking, its findings are not directly applicable to entrepreneurs because they do not reflect the complexities and challenges of the entrepreneurship context. Entrepreneurs' work is complex, encompasses multiple aspects of the business, and occurs in uncertain and dynamic conditions (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This has implications for the motivations that entrepreneurs may

have in relation to feedback seeking, the content of the feedback, and the individuals from whom entrepreneurs elicit feedback.

First, employees and entrepreneurs differ in the focus of their motivations. The organisational behaviour literature focuses on the motives and implications of seeking feedback for the individual (e.g. job performance or image defence) (Anseel et al., 2015), while entrepreneurs may also be concerned with their ventures. For example, they may be concerned with peers "blatantly stealing my designs, trade dress, branding etc." (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015, p. 578). Additionally, feedback seeking may have a negative effect on the public image of the individual as well as on the reputation of the venture because entrepreneurs' personal reputation influences the reputation of the venture (Chahine, Filatotchev & Zahra, 2011; Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

Second, employees and entrepreneurs differ in the topics of their feedback seeking. Employees' feedback seeking focuses on their individual performance and behaviours (e.g. De Stobbeleir et al., 2011; Renn & Fedor, 2001), however, entrepreneurs do not seem to seek feedback about themselves, instead they focus on their ventures. For example, they seek feedback about products, services (Fisher, 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012), and processes (Gemmell et al., 2012).

Third, employees and entrepreneurs differ in their sources of feedback. By *feedback sources* I mean the individuals from whom entrepreneurs elicit feedback. The organisational behaviour literature highlights that employees seek feedback from supervisors and peers mostly within their employing organisation (e.g. De Stobbeleir et al., 2011). Such feedback sources are both accessible to employees and have enough information about their work to give them meaningful feedback. However, in the context of entrepreneurship, individuals who are both accessible and have enough information to provide meaningful feedback are rarer. At the same time, entrepreneurs operate in multi-agency environments with numerous stakeholders, which leads to a greater number of potential feedback sources (Ashford et al., 2003). For example, entrepreneurs seek feedback

from individuals outside of the venture, such as investors, suppliers, and experts (e.g. Gemmell et al., 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012). However, entrepreneurs may lack a structured work environment (Collewaert et al., 2016) with designated feedback sources or more generally even lack direct access to feedback sources. This can be especially an issue in the early stages of the venture emergence process when working alone or among entrepreneurs with small and less diverse social networks. For example, a rural artisan in Kuhn & Galloway's (2015) study on peer support comments that "[n]o one from my area can relate to what I do" (p. 578), thus highlighting the difficulty of finding individuals to ask for feedback compared to employees who are surrounded by potential feedback sources.

2.6.2. First research question

In summary, the emerging literature on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and the established literature on employees' feedback seeking do not explain why and why not entrepreneurs seek feedback. The emerging literature on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking focuses on other theories (i.e. effectuation, bricolage, and action regulation) and processes whereby feedback seeking acts as a micro-foundation. It addresses when entrepreneurs seek feedback and with what positive consequences they do so. However, it does not address why entrepreneurs seek feedback nor does it address the puzzling finding that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback given the positive outcomes (Katre & Salipante, 2012). Overall, the entrepreneurship literature on feedback seeking ignores the individuals who seek feedback and focuses on the outcomes.

The organisational behaviour literature offers the critical insight that individuals may experience conflicting motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback. However, it does not provide concrete descriptions of the conflicting motivations of entrepreneurs because it does not reflect the complexities and challenges of the entrepreneurship context. It ignores the venture as a source of motivations to seek and not to seek feedback, however,

in the context of entrepreneurship, there is a strong connection between the entrepreneur and the venture, especially in the early stages of the venture emergence process. Additionally, it does not consider feedback seeking from diverse sources in different directions: upward (from investors or advisors), downward (from employees), horizontal (from co-founders), and outward (from experts or other entrepreneurs), which are common among entrepreneurs. Overall, the organisational behaviour literature ignores the venture, the context of entrepreneurs, and how this context may provide additional reasons to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback. These challenge and limitations have been acknowledged by organisational behaviour researchers who have called for research that explores feedback seeking amongst entrepreneurs (e.g. Ashford et al., 2003; 2016). Therefore, to deepen our understanding of feedback seeking in the entrepreneurship context, the first research question guiding this doctoral thesis is:

Research question 1: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback?*

2.7. Toward the second research question

The potentially conflicting motivations to seek and not to seek feedback raise the question of how entrepreneurs actually seek feedback. Both entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour literatures suggest that entrepreneurs may experience conflicting motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback. While actions and interactions populate the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2015), the exact interactions through which entrepreneurs seek feedback are surprisingly missing from the literature because entrepreneurs' feedback seeking on its own is under-developed. Building on the motivations to seek and not to seek feedback, the next logical question is how exactly do entrepreneurs seek feedback? Understanding how entrepreneurs seek feedback can provide the next building block of the transparent process that is

required to examine feedback seeking as an entrepreneurship micro-foundation in the future (van Burg & Romme, 2014).

Two theoretical lenses can provide insights into the responses to potentially conflicting feedback-seeking motivations: contingency and paradox. Contingency and paradox are metatheories, thus they act as overarching perspectives that can be applied to different contexts, variables, and methods, regardless of core concepts (Lewis & Smith, 2014).

2.7.1. Contingency theory

The organisational behaviour literature has employed a contingency approach when studying feedback seeking so far. For instance, Anseel and colleagues (2015) summarise: "The general assumption underlying this cost-value framework posits that employees make a conscious assessment of the costs and values that are associated with FSB [feedback-seeking behaviour]. Generally, this cost-value analysis is regarded as the primary determinant of subsequent FSB." (p. 320). This approach conceptualises self- and public image defence motives as moderators that reduce the frequency of feedback seeking among employees (e.g. Ashford, 1986; Hays & Williams, 2011; Levy et al., 1995; Tuckey et al., 2002).

The contingency approach presents an "either/or" framework of selecting the best action to achieve maximum effectiveness. Contingency theory assumes that there is an optimal fit based on priorities, contingencies, and outcomes (Lewis & Smith, 2014). This approach of choosing either one or another among conflicting motivations is common in research on goal-directed behaviour. The research on intergoal dynamics emphasises that individuals shield themselves from the activation of alternative goals that might distract them from the main goal when they face conflicting goals. Individuals can also shift between goals based on progress and completion of one goal before engaging with another goal (Cavallo & Fitzsimons, 2012). This "either/or" approach emphasises primary and secondary

goals whereby secondary goals are temptations of lower value and individuals need to focus on primary goals. Beyond proposing inquiry and monitoring as general feedback seeking strategies and suggesting that feedback seeking frequency would decrease in light of potentially conflicting motivations, a contingency lens on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking does not provide insights into how exactly entrepreneurs seek feedback and how they reconcile potentially conflicting feedback-seeking motives.

2.7.2. Paradox theory

A different approach to managing conflicting demands is offered by paradox theory. Paradox denotes "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). Such elements can take a wide variety of forms, such as motivations, perspectives, feelings, messages, demands, identities, interests, or practices. Instead of polarising phenomena with an "either/or" contingency approach, paradox involves a "both/and" approach that embeds contradiction and interdependence between contradictory elements (for reviews see Fairhurst et al., 2016; Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016; Schad et al., 2016). Therefore, the core of a paradox lens is problem solving through co-existence, instead of fit (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014).

Paradoxes have three core characteristics. First, paradoxes present *contradictory elements* that are logical when viewed separately, but irrational and inconsistent with each other when viewed together. Second, paradoxes are *interrelated* as the contradictory elements are synergetic when viewed as part of a larger system. These contradictory elements represent different sides of the same entity. In paradoxical terms, the movement toward one element is a movement away from the other element, but it also emphasises the existence and the importance of the larger system with both elements. Third, paradoxes are *persistent* and individuals and organisations can only manage them over time, but cannot

resolve them with a single action (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Smith, 2014).

The literature suggests four types of paradoxes. First, paradoxes of organising embed tensions inherent in complex systems and organisations that create competing designs and processes, such as routine and change. Second, paradoxes of learning embed tensions inherent during change, renewal, and innovation that involve destroying old knowledge to create new knowledge. Third, paradoxes of belonging embed identity tensions inherent in being a part of a collective, yet seeking distinction. Finally, paradoxes of performing embed tensions arising from performing contradictory roles and activities to achieve contradictory goals. These tensions can be particularly salient when the same action can achieve a positive outcome for one side of the paradox and a negative outcome for the other side of the paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Research suggests that macroparadoxes of organising arising from organisational change can inform mesoparadoxes of belonging and microparadoxes of learning and performing for individuals (Jarzabkowski, Lê & Van de Ven, 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). As individuals experience tensions in relation to their roles and goals (i.e. paradox of performing) during organisational change, they engage in specific actions, such as developing separate product plans or employing integrated project dashboards. Such actions can be embedded in organisational procedures, thus generating organisational-level responses to paradox (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

A paradox lens on contradictory elements encourages research on the responses actors enact (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Research suggests three general ways to respond to paradox. First, actors can accept the paradox (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) and learn to live through it (Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Second, they can engage in differentiation (also labeled separation), which values both elements of the paradox and splits them. Differentiation can be spatial as contradictory elements are compartmentalised into different business units or hierarchical levels or temporally separated as actors engage

with each contradictory element at different points in time. For example, in the case of innovation ambidexterity, differentiation may involve allocating domain specific roles whereby different individuals focus only on radical or incremental innovation (Smith, 2014). Third, actors can engage in integration (also labeled synthesis) to address contradictory elements together by finding synergies between them (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith, 2014). For example, in the case of innovation ambidexterity, integration may involve allocating integrative roles whereby an individual focuses on both radical and incremental innovation (Smith, 2014). While paradoxes cannot be resolved with a single action, they can be managed through active engagement that embraces the tensions (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Such active management of paradoxes involves both differentiation and integration general responses (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; 2010; Smith, 2014), yet the specific responses for individual actors may be different (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010; Gotsi et al., 2010).

A large body of research with a paradox lens examines mostly organisational-level responses to tensions from an organisation studies perspective. While paradoxes can exist at multiple levels of analysis (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010) and even be nested within different levels of analysis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008), most of the paradox research is focused at the organisational level of analysis (Putnam et al., 2016; Schad et al., 2016). This stream of research examines how organisations deal with tensions embedded in innovation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; 2010; Smith, 2014), change (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008), complexity and hybridity (Jay, 2013), or how middle managers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008) or senior leaders (Smith, 2014) manage paradoxes informed by the organisation. Even when paradox studies investigate individual tensions, for example related to identity tensions of professionals in the creative industries, they investigate the managerial, social, and cultural approaches within organisations that can aid the management of these individual tensions (Gotsi et al., 2010; Knight &

Harvey, 2015). Two exemptions in this paradox tradition apply the lens at the individual level of analysis. First, Miron-Spektor, Gino, and Argote (2011) demonstrate that priming individuals with a paradoxical approach stimulates conflict and integrative thinking, thus enhancing individual creativity. Second, Miller and Sardais (2015) apply the paradox lens to suggest that entrepreneurs can be both optimists and realists, can be both adaptable and persistent by using temporal separation and adopting these different attitudes (e.g. optimism vs realism) with different time frames.

A smaller stream of research in organisational behaviour, independent from the organisational studies, examines paradoxes at the individual level of analysis. This stream of research mostly focuses on the different and competing roles leaders and managers enact (Denison, Hooijberg & Quinn, 1995; Hart & Quinn, 1993; Hooijberg & Choi, 2000; Lawrence, Lenk & Quinn, 2009). Such competing roles include innovator vs. coordinator or mentor vs. director (Denison et al., 1995). In contrast to organisational studies, this stream of research does not investigate how actors respond to paradoxical tensions. Instead, it mostly investigates competing roles independently (for an exemption see Zhang et al., 2015) and focuses on individual attributes that enable multiple roles. The first attribute is cognitive complexity, which is an individual's ability to see more dimensions of an entity and commonalities between dimensions or entities, which includes integrative thinking. For example, cognitive complexity includes a leader's ability to see his/her role as both a mentor and a director. The second attribute is behavioural complexity, which is an individual's ability to enact multiple and competing roles (Denison et al., 1995; Hart & Quinn, 1993; Wu, Steward & Hartley, 2010). For example, behavioural complexity includes a leader's enactment of mentor and director roles.

While paradox theory suggests broad types of responses (i.e. acceptance, differentiation, and integration), it is not clear what these broad responses mean for potentially conflicting motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback.

2.7.3. Second research question

In summary, two metatheoretical lenses can offer partial insights into how entrepreneurs seek feedback. First, adopting a contingency lens, organisational behaviour research suggests that in light of conflicting motivations individuals choose to either seek or not to seek feedback. This "either/or" approach emphasises primary and secondary goals whereby secondary goals are temptations of lower value and individuals need to focus on primary goals. This metatheoretical perspective suggests that entrepreneurs' motivations not to seek feedback will reduce their overall frequency of feedback seeking. Yet it does not describe how exactly entrepreneurs seek feedback. Second, two different streams of research on paradox propose that in general actors can manage contradictory demands through a "both/and" approach and leveraging personal attributes to perform multiple roles. Paradox theory provides a framework of broad types of responses to contradictory tensions and encourages the examination of the exact responses actors enact in light of specific tensions. Yet, it does not provide insights into how entrepreneurs seek feedback in light of motivations to both seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback. Therefore, to deepen our understanding of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as a micro-foundation, the second research question guiding this doctoral thesis is:

Research question 2: *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?*

2.8. Third research question

The potential motivations to refrain from feedback seeking raise the question of how entrepreneurs's feedback seeking relates to venture emergence. Theoretical and empirical research suggests that feedback seeking is related to the performance of entrepreneurs (Frese, 2007; 2009) or the emergence of their ventures (e.g. Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). The proposed relationship between individuals' feedback seeking and their performance is

supported by research in organisational behaviour, which shows that when seeking feedback through direct inquiry, employees's task and creative performance may be evaluated positively (Anseel et al., 2015; De Stobbeleir et al., 2011). However, the relationship between entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and venture emergence as a collective higher-order outcome is only suggested in entrepreneurship research, often in combination with other behaviours and processes (e.g. Katre & Salipante, 2012), or completely ignored in organisational behaviour research (Ashford et al., 2016). Yet the dynamics of how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relates to higher-order outcomes, such as venture emergence, need to be explored given the possible negative outcomes entrepreneurs may expect from seeking feedback. For example, entrepreneurs' experience of peers "blatantly stealing my designs, trade dress, branding etc." (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015, p. 578) challenges the current assumption that feedback seeking is always beneficial for venture emergence. Building on the motivations to refrain from seeking feedback, the next logical question is how does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence? Understanding the nuances and complexities of the relationship between entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and venture emergence can provide the next building block of the transparent process that is required to examine feedback seeking as an entrepreneurship micro-foundation in the future (van Burg & Romme, 2014). Therefore, to deepen our understanding of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as a micro-foundation, the third research question guiding this doctoral thesis is:

Research question 3: *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?*

2.9. Chapter summary

The grounds for generating new theory that addresses the "why" and "how" questions of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking become evident when significant gaps in the literatures on

entrepreneurship, organisational behaviour, and conflicting demands are considered together. In this chapter, I discussed how micro-foundations of entrepreneurship, such as actions and interactions, are becoming more prominent as a research topic that can advance the field and support entrepreneurs (Barney & Felin, 2013; Shepherd, 2015; van Burg & Romme, 2014). An important micro-foundation seems to be feedback seeking, which can play a significant role in fundamental entrepreneurship theories, such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008), bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012), and action-regulation (Frese, 2007; 2009), and processes, such as innovation (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015) and decision making (Eisenhardt, 1989). Yet entrepreneurs' feedback seeking seems to be too obvious to be remarkable as a research topic on its own. The current approach of studying feedback seeking as part of broader processes does not adequately address the complexities and intricacies of feedback seeking as a phenomenon in its own right. Our current understanding of feedback seeking amongst entrepreneurs is limited and includes puzzling findings and under-developed elements, which remain even when additional streams of research, such as employees' feedback seeking, and theoretical lenses, such as contingency and paradox theories, are considered. Therefore, the overall aim of this doctoral thesis is to investigate *why entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback, how they seek feedback,* and *how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relates to venture emergence* to develop a model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking.

Why, why not, and how entrepreneurs seek feedback, particularly in relation to venture emergence, are important questions for understanding how this interaction influences entrepreneurial processes. First, investigating these research questions together can address the puzzling finding that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre & Salipante, 2012) despite its potential positive outcomes for the entrepreneur (Frese, 2007; 2009) and the venture (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). Second, answering the "why" and "how" questions of a phenomenon provides the theoretical

foundation to understand and investigate the phenomenon in the future (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Whetten, 1989). Given feedback seeking's suggested role as a micro-foundation of entrepreneurship embedded in diverse theories and processes, such a framework is important to provide a transparent process that explicates why and how a particular outcome occurs in a particular context (van Burg & Romme, 2014). Developing the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can contribute to the emerging research programmes on micro-foundations of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2015) and the entrepreneurial method (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011), which also depends on such micro-foundations to enable individuals to act entrepreneurially.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN.

3.1. Introduction

The research questions guiding this doctoral thesis focus on understanding *why entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback, how they seek feedback,* and *how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relates to venture emergence.* To address these research questions, I employed a grounded theory approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which is appropriate for three different reasons. First, given the limited theoretical and empirical research on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, an inductive theory building approach can provide an illuminating and insightful foundation to investigate the phenomenon in the future. Second, a grounded theory approach fits my research questions, which focus on the "why" and "how" elements of the feedback-seeking phenomenon (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Pratt, 2009), because this approach focuses not only on describing "what" is happening, but also on providing theoretical explanations for "why" it is happening and "how" it is happening (Corley, 2015). Third, using a grounded theory approach to understand why, why not, and how entrepreneurs seek feedback fits the philosophical roots of grounded theory in American pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, which focus on understanding the actions and interactions of individuals in and with their social contexts (Locke, 2001; Suddaby, 2006). The philosophical traditions influencing grounded theory conceptualise individuals as thinking and creative agents who create meanings and act purposefully as they interpret their social contexts and interactions (Locke, 2001). From this perspective, research is concerned with how individuals understand and act in response to their situations from their own point of view. Instead of imposing constructs and theories, the purpose of a grounded theory approach is to represent the experiences of those living the phenomenon under investigation in a systematic way that remains close to their lived experiences and provides plausible and

often novel theoretical explanations based on emergent models (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012; Locke, 2001).

To develop an emergent model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking that explains why, why not, how they seek feedback, and how feedback seeking relates to venture emergence, I collected data from 37 nascent social entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom and engaged in a recursive process of data collection, analysis, and consultation with existing literatures (Locke, 2001). In this chapter I describe in detail the research process. While the process of data collection, analysis, and consultation with literatures was iterative to clarify insights, in this chapter I describe each task separately and even delineate data analysis steps to increase ease of reading (Suddaby, 2006). I start with why nascent social entrepreneurs were selected as a relevant research context and provide information about the participants in the study. Next, I elaborate on the data collection and management methods and describe the steps involved in the analysis. Finally, I discuss how I ensured the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.2. Research context

The circumstances that nascent social entrepreneurs face made them a strategic research context for this project because they can be considered an extreme context in which to study entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. Extreme contexts are useful for inductive theory building research because the phenomenon under study and its elements, dynamics, or tensions are more visible compared to ordinary settings (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Based on my adopted definition of social entrepreneurship (see Chapter Two), social entrepreneurs are individuals engaged in the process of identifying, developing, and exploiting opportunities for new economic activity to pursue a social objective. Nascent social entrepreneurs are individuals who have started this process, but have not established operational ventures yet (Reynolds & Curtin, 2008). This means that they may have started trading and received

financing, but do not have sustainable surpluses yet. Nascent social entrepreneurs can be considered an extreme context in which to study potential feedback-seeking tensions because they arguably place high value on feedback seeking, but also face challenges and strong reasons to refrain from seeking feedback.

On the one hand, nascent social entrepreneurs are in a position to value feedback seeking highly for two reasons. First, considering the challenges introduced by the hybrid nature of social entrepreneurship, feedback seeking is arguably a valuable activity for nascent social entrepreneurs as it can help them to manage the complexity and uncertainty inherent in social ventures. As discussed in the previous chapter, social entrepreneurship is a hybrid phenomenon combining elements of the not-for-profit and commercial sectors. As hybrid organisations, social ventures face tensions and contradictions, difficulties to access resources, and internal conflict among venture members (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). These challenges can have significant negative effects on social ventures as they can make it difficult to operate effectively (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) and maintain desirable levels of productivity (Battilana et al., 2013). Additionally, social ventures often address complex societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and drug addiction recovery in resource-scarce environments (e.g. Mair & Martí, 2009; Mair, Martí & Ventresca, 2012; Perrini et al., 2010). Taking these challenges together, it is not surprising that social ventures are less likely to become operational compared to commercial ventures (Renko, 2013). Second, theoretical and empirical research suggests that feedback seeking can be beneficial for social entrepreneurs and their ventures to maintain the venture's social mission (André & Pache, 2014), understand beneficiaries' needs, and manage their expectations (Walk et al., 2015).

On the other hand, nascent social entrepreneurs are in a position to value refraining from seeking feedback for two reasons. First, social entrepreneurs arguably place a high value on their public image, which can be damaged by seeking feedback. How

entrepreneurs are perceived by relevant others, such as employees, investors, and customers, is important because it can influence the public image of their ventures (Chahine et al., 2011; Roberts & Dowling, 2002), IPO performance (Chahine et al., 2011), and purchasing and employment decisions (Sohn, Lariscy & Tinkham, 2009). Yet feedback seeking may be perceived as a sign of weakness or insecurity (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, Levy et al., 1995), which violates expectations of entrepreneurs as competent and confident, thus damaging their public image. This public image concern can be particularly salient for social entrepreneurs who aim to construct a positive external image (Pache & Santos, 2013; Ruebottom, 2013) because their ventures struggle to establish legitimacy due to their hybrid nature (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2010). Additionally, social entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom attracts individuals who traditionally have been less involved in commercial entrepreneurship in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnicity (Social Enterprise UK, 2013, 2015). As these individuals deviate from the mainstream stereotype of who is an entrepreneur, they can potentially be even more careful with the public image they aim to construct. Second, nascent social entrepreneurs arguably face significant resource constraints to seek feedback. As nascent social entrepreneurs engage diverse stakeholders from the not-for-profit and commercial fields (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Shaw & Carter, 2007), they are likely to have more potential sources of feedback on more topics, which requires more time, effort, and energy compared to entrepreneurs who engage with less diverse stakeholder groups. Considering image issues and resource requirements to seek feedback from diverse stakeholders, nascent social entrepreneurs may also be motivated to refrain from seeking feedback.

Taken together, these considerations make nascent social entrepreneurs an excellent theoretical context for developing theory about entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and the potentially conflicting motivations embedded in the phenomenon. Nascent social entrepreneurs are a theoretically strategic choice to study why, why

not, and how entrepreneurs seek feedback, yet, as discussed in Chapter Two, social and commercial entrepreneurs also adopt similar approaches, methods, processes, and perceptions. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, I do not investigate social entrepreneurship as a separate phenomenon, but consider it a unique context that allows me to uncover insights that can have broader implications for entrepreneurs in general (Dacin et al., 2010; Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009). Selecting a theoretically relevant and narrow context, such as social entrepreneurs, is particularly appropriate for research in entrepreneurship, which is a very heterogeneous phenomenon across a variety of dimensions: individuals involved and their motivations, size, age, level of innovation, industry, environment, regulations, etc. (Davidsson, 2003; Davidsson & Delmar, 2012). Other scholars have made a similar decision to focus on specific theoretically rich or extreme contexts to study phenomena relevant to all entrepreneurs and organisations because the exact context brings to the forefront the underlying concepts, dynamics, and nuances. For example, Reymen et al. (2015) examined the dynamics of strategic decision making in venture creation with a sample of high technology ventures which operate in contexts of high uncertainty, while Cennamo et al. (2012) used family firms to theorise how principal's conflicting financial and non-financial goals influence stakeholder management.

3.3. Data collection

To study why entrepreneurs seek and refrain from seeking feedback and how they manage potentially conflicting motivations, I collected data from 37 nascent social entrepreneurs through interviews and questionnaires in 2014 and early 2015.

3.3.1. Participant recruitment

The participants for this research project were 37 nascent social entrepreneurs recruited from two large social entrepreneurship support organisations in the United Kingdom as a part of a broader

research project on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. The two organisations sent emails to all individuals who had applied for support in the previous 12 months informing them about the research project and providing a link for those interested in participating. I screened potential participants on three main criteria: 1.) currently trying to start any kind of activity, organisation or initiative that has a particular social, environmental or community objective; 2.) has taken active steps in the past 12 months to start this activity, organisation or initiative; and 3.) generates or plans to generate revenue through trading, but the venture is not operational yet (i.e. it does not have more than three consecutive months of surplus). While some of the participants had two or more ventures at the time when the project started, I focused only on the early-stage social venture, thus studying an entrepreneur-venture pair together.

I aimed to recruit a diverse group of entrepreneurs based on their personal (e.g. age, sex, experience) and venture characteristics (e.g. development stage, market type). For example, entrepreneurs ranged in age from early 20s to over 65 years old. Some of them were university students or recent graduates with no or limited work experience while others had 45 years of work experience or were serial entrepreneurs. The ventures ranged in development stage from ideation to trading, number of founders and employees, and region. A summary of the entrepreneurs and their ventures is presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, respectively. I stopped adding entrepreneurs to the project sample after reaching theoretical saturation and was no longer making substantial new inferences as more data was collected from additional participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.3.2. Data sources

3.3.2.1. Interviews

Due to the private and interpersonal nature of feedback seeking, most of the data for this project came from semi-structured interviews. I considered semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate data collection method for the purpose of this study for

TABLE 3.1. ENTREPRENEURS' CHARACTERISTICS

Entrepreneur[1]	Venture[2]	Age	Sex	Work experience	Entrepreneurial experience[3]	Number of interviews
Olivia	Splash	35-44	F	7	No	2
Eva	New Family	25-34	F	16	Yes	1
Peter	WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy	35-44	M	15	No	3
Jennifer	Age Better	55-64	F	40	Yes	2
Andrew	Youth Entrepreneurs	25-34	M	7	Yes	3
Calvin	The Workshop	45-54	M	35	Yes	2
Tim	eCare	45-54	M	30	Yes	3
Alister	A to Z	55-64	M	40	No	1
Josie B.	Future Catering and Training Services	35-44	F	15	No	2
Dominic	Prison Impact	55-64	M	25	Yes	2
Sam	Secret Platform	16-24	M	1	Yes	2
Adrian	No to Violence	25-34	M	5	No	1
Colin	New Media	25-34	M	2	No	1
Samantha	Stop!	55-64	F	20	No	2
Sarah	Pet Partners	45-54	F	30	No	1
Selena	Serious Play	16-24	F	0	No	2
Pradip	Refresh Café	25-34	M	7	Yes	3
Angela N.	Baby Steps	45-54	F	20	No	1
Sandra	Musicability	45-54	F	25	No	1
Yvette	Education for Today	65+	F	19	Yes	2
Daniel H.	Local Works	25-34	M	8	No	3
Lisa	Velove	25-34	F	4	No	2
Brandon	Motion	55-64	M	30	No	2
Rose	For Mums	45-54	F	20	No	1
Clinton	City Produce	45-54	M	28	Yes	1
Josie H.	Ableployment	45-54	F	33	Yes	3
Angela J.	Able Waves	45-54	F	16	Yes	4
Lauren	Local Sights	55-64	F	45	Yes	1

Entrepreneur[1]	Venture[2]	Age	Sex	Work experience	Entrepreneurial experience[3]	Number of interviews
Roger	Able Generation	25-34	M	10	No	3
Robin	Eat Well	45-54	F	12	Yes	1
Elinor	Life with FASD	55-64	F	30	No	2
Greg	Growing Green	35-44	M	19	No	1
June	UpCycle Couture	45-54	F	25	Yes	1
Sadie	Active Strength	35-44	F	20	No	3
Matthew	Compassion	45-54	M	20	Yes	1
Clara	A Million Smiles	25-34	F	6	Yes	1
Josephine	Project: Family	55-64	F	40	No	1
Natalie	Dance for All	35-44	F	20	Yes	2
Daniel S.	Easy Green	35-44	M	20	Yes	1

[1] All personal names are anonymised to protect the identity of the participants.
[2] All venture names are anonymised to protect the identity of the participants.
[3] Previously started (alone or with others) a commercial, environmental, or social venture.

TABLE 3.2. VENTURE CHARACTERISTICS

Venture	Founders	Industry	Development stage	Market type	Age[1]	Staff	Region
Splash	1	Multiple	Already sell	Mixed	24	0	London
New Family	1	Health, social and community services	In development	B-to-B	25	0	North West
WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy	1	Multiple	Ready to sell	B-to-B	19	0	North West
Age Better	1	Health, social and community services	Ready to sell	B-to-B	18	0	East Midlands
Youth Entrepreneurs	1	Employment services	Prototype	B-to-B	22	2	Scotland
The Workshop	1	Multiple	Idea	Mixed	5	0	East of Scotland
eCare	1	Health, social and community services	Prototype	B-to-B	35	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
A to Z	2	Education	Prototype	B-to-B	36	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
Future Catering and Training Services	1	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	Prototype	B-to-B	6	0	Scotland
Prison Impact	3	Health, social and community services	Ready to sell	B-to-B	6	0	South East
Secret Platform	4	Health, social and community services	In development	B-to-B	11	0	London
No to Violence	1	Education	Already sell	B-to-B	107	5	South West
New Media	2	Business-related services	Already sell	B-to-B	27	10	London
Stop!	1	Health, social and community services	In development	B-to-B	24	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
Pet Partners	1	Health, social and community services	In development	Mixed	31	0	North West
Serious Play	1	Education	Prototype	B-to-B	24	0	London

Venture	Founders	Industry	Development stage	Market type	Age[1]	Staff	Region
Refresh Café	2	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	In development	B-to-C	7	0	South East
Baby Steps	1	Business-related services	Already sell	B-to-C	12	0	London
Musicability	1	Health, social and community services	In development	Mixed	10	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
Education for Today	1	Education	In development	B-to-B	168	0	South West
Local Works	1	Employment services	In development	B-to-B	9	1	South East
Velove	2	Multiple	Already sell	Mixed	24	18	Scotland
Motion	1	Employment services	Already sell	B-to-B	15	7	Scotland
For Mums	1	Multiple	Already sell	Mixed	50	1	London
City Produce	1	Agriculture	In development	Mixed	6	0	North West
Ableployment	1	Multiple	Already sell	B-to-B	30	3	West Midlands
Able Waves	1	Multiple	Already sell	B-to-B	36	0	West Midlands
Local Sights	2	Education	In development	Mixed	8	0	North West
Able Generation	1	Employment services	Prototype	B-to-B	8	0	London
Eat Well	2	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	Already sell	B-to-B	13	0	London
Life with FASD	2	Health, social and community services	Prototype	B-to-B	18	0	Scotland
Growing Green	1	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	In development	Mixed	13	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
UpCycle Couture	1	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	Already sell	Mixed	30	1	London
Active Strength	1	Health, social and community services	Already sell	B-to-C	12	0	London

Venture	Founders	Industry	Development stage	Market type	Age[1]	Staff	Region
Compassion	2	Health, social and community services	Already sell	B-to-B	5	0	East Midlands
A Million Smiles	5	Other	Ready to sell	Mixed	67	0	West Midlands
Project: Family	2	Health, social and community services	Already sell	B-to-B	48	10	West Midlands
Dance for All	1	Other	Already sell	Mixed	36	0	Yorkshire and the Humber
Easy Green	1	Wholesale, retail and gastronomy	Already sell	B-to-C	15	0	Yorkshire and the Humber

[1] Number of months since first firm-founding activity.

three reasons. First, through interviews entrepreneurs could provide rich and detailed accounts of specific interactions regardless of their magnitude and outcomes, while evidence of feedback seeking interactions were less likely to be found in archival documentation.

Second, interviews are less obtrusive compared to observation, thus minimising the influence of the researcher on the phenomenon under study, in this case feedback seeking. Third, through interviews entrepreneurs could provide accounts of situations in which they considered seeking feedback but did not engage in a feedback-seeking interaction, which was important for understanding why entrepreneurs refrain from seeking feedback. Overall, interviews provided an opportunity to understand entrepreneurs' interpretations, motivations, and interactions from their own perspectives and offered access to events of not seeking feedback, which would not be easily observable by the researcher or other stakeholders. From this perspective, entrepreneurs were the best informants of their own motivations, concerns, and strategies in relation to feedback seeking.

I conducted 71 interviews, up to four with each entrepreneur. I started with semi-structured interviews to provide as wide a scope as possible to the data in understanding the venture, its context, and the entrepreneurs' feedback-seeking interactions, motivations, challenges, and sources of feedback. To minimise recollection bias and salience effects, I focused the feedback-seeking questions on specific interactions from the past two months, the challenges around these interactions, and how the entrepreneurs responded regardless of the outcome of the interaction. This allowed me to capture mundane, significant, in progress, and even considered, yet not implemented, feedback-seeking interactions. Interview questions included: "Thinking about the last two months, when was the last time you asked someone for feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why, how, from whom, about what?]", "What made it easy to seek feedback in that case?", "What made it difficult to seek feedback in that case?", "Can you give me another example from the past two months of seeking feedback in a different situation? [Probe for elaboration: why, when, how, from whom, about what?]", "In the past

two months, were there situations in which you were reluctant to seek feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why/why not, when, about what, from whom?]", "What did you do in that situation?", "Can you give me another example from the past two months of a situation in which you were reluctant to seek feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why, when, how, from whom, about what, how responded?]". However, as the entrepreneurs shared their feedback-seeking experiences, they also referred to older feedback-seeking interactions that had an impact on the entrepreneurs in relation to learning how to seek feedback. To minimise social desirability bias in the accounts of the entrepreneurs, a tone of supportive neutrality was maintained during all interviews (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). Interviews lasted between 40 and 165 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

After the initial interviews, data collection continued with more structured interviews to explore emerging theoretical themes in more depth from certain participants, perform data checks, and clarify information from certain participants, which facilitated my effort to uncover novel insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gioia et al., 2012). For example, as the data revealed that seeking feedback from family members could be challenging, I included questions on the topic in interviews with new participants and conducted secondary and tertiary interviews to gather more data on the topic and clarify the insights. This resulted in more robust first interviews with entrepreneurs who joined the project later in the process and were interviewed using a more refined interview guide and a greater number of interviews with entrepreneurs who joined the project earlier in the process, which is common in research with a grounded theory approach (e.g. Corley & Gioia, 2004).

3.3.2.2. Questionnaires

I used two types of questionnaires for this research. The first type of questionnaires, which was distributed by the social entrepreneurship support organisations, was used to screen participants so I could recruit only individuals who were starting new

social ventures, but those ventures were not operational yet. This questionnaire focused on the three main selection criteria based on established questions from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Terjesen et al., 2012): 1.) currently trying to start any kind of activity, organisation or initiative that has a particular social, environmental or community objective; 2.) has taken active steps in the past 12 months to start this activity, organisation or initiative; and 3.) generates or plans to generate revenue through trading, but the venture is not operational yet. Additionally, the questionnaire included basic questions about the venture and the entrepreneur (e.g. date of first firm-founding activity, age of entrepreneur, number of founders, location).

The second type of questionnaires was used to collect data on firm-founding activities, milestones, and venture performance (e.g. first sale, firm registration, size, surplus) based on established questions from the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (Reynolds & Curtin, 2008) and innovation based on established questions from the Community Innovation Survey (Eurostat, 2010). This questionnaire was administered 12 months after an entrepreneur joined the project to provide insights and understanding of the venture emergence progress.

3.3.3. Ethical considerations

This project was fully approved by the Ethics Committee at Sheffield University Management School and followed all requirements in relation to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw, and digital data storage. The data was anonymised by giving pseudonyms to all entrepreneurs and their ventures and not disclosing data that may be used to identify an individual entrepreneur.

3.4. Data management

I imported and organised all interview transcripts into NVivo version 10. NVivo allowed for safe digital storage of all data and

memos. The software facilitated the iterative waves of data analysis and theorising by enabling me to search, code, recode, and visualise data as themes emerged.

3.5. Data analysis

Consistent with the grounded theory approach, I started data analysis as I collected data. This method allowed me to identify initial concepts within the data and use them to focus future data collection. Overall, the analysis involved cycling between the data, the emerging theoretical insights, multiple literatures, and generating new theoretical insights iteratively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While this process was iterative, in this section I differentiate four major steps to provide a more comprehensive and transparent account of the analytical method. First, through open coding, I categorised the raw data into first-order categories that gave voice to the individuals engaged in the phenomenon under study and made their point of view the foundation of the analysis. Second, through axial coding, I abstracted and consolidated first-order categories into second-order sub-themes and themes, which were more theoretical interpretations of the participants' lived experiences. Third, I aggregated second-order sub-themes and themes into theoretical dimensions. In the final stage of data analysis, the theoretical dimensions, together with existing literature and additional analysis, provided the building blocks of an emergent theoretical framework that includes the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, an overall ambidextrous approach, and consequences of feedback seeking to explain why, why not, how, and with what consequences entrepreneurs seek feedback. These major steps are described below and summarised in Figure 3.1, which is the progressive data structure that visualises how the first-order categories connect to conceptual second-order sub-themes and themes that are aggregated into theoretical dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012).

3.5.1. Step 1: Open coding

I began open coding by reading a transcript and writing general comments and memos about the events and perspectives of the participants in relation to feedback-seeking events and interactions. After an initial review of the data, I conceptually coded units of meaning using "in-vivo" labels, which is the language used by the entrepreneur. When in-vivo labels were not available, I used simple phrases to describe the meaning of the unit. Using in-vivo labels and simple phrases to code the data at this phase allowed me to develop first-order categories that remained close to the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs. I engaged in constant comparison whereby each unit of meaning was compared to the previous one in the transcript as well as all units within a category, thus across transcripts, were compared to one another to determine if they reflected the same experience in order to refine the boundaries of each first-order category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). If the unit reflected the same experience, I used the same code as a label, however, if it reflected a different experience, I used a distinct code. For example, entrepreneurs' descriptions of seeking feedback to make them feel more confident about their ideas, approaches, and directions, and descriptions of seeking feedback to reduce confusion and make a choice between a limited number of options were coded as distinct first-order categories because of their differences. In this example, those units of meaning were included in the categories "Seeking feedback to confirm choices and directions" and "Seeking feedback to select between options", respectively.

At this early phase of data analysis, I identified myriads of reasons why entrepreneurs sought or did not seek feedback as well as different feedback-seeking interactions. To identify specific motivations why entrepreneurs did not seek feedback, I paid attention not only to explicit statements, such as "did not because", "concerned with", but also language indicators for mixed messages, such as "yet", "but", "on the one hand… on the other hand". Once I had a stable set of first-order categories, I went back to all transcripts

to make sure they fit the first-order categories and made changes to the coding scheme when needed to further refine it.

3.5.2. Step 2: Axial coding

As the process of open coding continued, I also began the process of axial coding to search for relationships between the many first-order categories to generate second-order themes. The first-order categories described the key elements of the entrepreneurs' feedback-seeking experiences from their own perspectives, but they did not reveal theoretical explanations and relationships. To distill themes that could serve as theoretical building blocks of a grounded theory, I engaged in axial coding to develop second-order sub-themes and themes that presented the data at a higher level of theoretical abstraction. I started examining the first-order categories asking the question "What's going on here?" to focus on theoretical concepts and tentative relationships emerging from the data (Gioia et al., 2012). Again, I used the constant comparison technique to compare and differentiate the second-order themes that encompassed the first-order categories and elaborated the dimensions and boundaries of these themes in memos (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This resulted in an initial set of themes that were used to guide future data collection and analysis. As more data was collected and analysed, I developed new themes and made changes to the initial themes where the data did not fit. When themes were created or changed, I reanalysed previously analysed transcripts based on the new set of themes, thus further refining the coding scheme and theoretical elements. Following the earlier example, at this stage I combined the first-order categories of "Seeking feedback to confirm choices and directions" and "Seeking feedback to select between options" along with "Experiencing doubt and confusion" and "Seeking feedback to generate options" as "Reducing response uncertainty" second-order sub-theme.

At this stage of data analysis, I synthesised the many reasons entrepreneurs expressed for seeking and not seeking feedback into

eight second-order sub-themes that represented eight different feedback-seeking goals: reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving, building reputation, managing resources, maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships, and maintain reputation. I further abstracted these goals to another theoretical level by developing two higher-order second-order themes of "Development goals" and "Protection goals", which captured entrepreneurs' motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback, respectively. I also synthesised the different feedback-seeking interactions and differentiated them as being short-term and long-term feedback-seeking strategies.

3.5.3. Step 3: Aggregated dimensions

Once I had a stable set of second-order themes and was no longer making substantial new inferences, thus reaching a point of theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I started to distill the emergent second-order themes to an even higher level of theoretical abstraction to develop "aggregated dimensions" (Gioia et al., 2012). I identified themes that were closely related to each other, combined them into the same aggregate dimension, and looked for insights into how the aggregated dimensions were related to each other as general dimensions and overarching concepts relevant to the feedback-seeking phenomenon.

I also engaged with multiple theories that could address the emerging empirical puzzle, including dialectics, tensions, paradox, and inter-goal dynamics. I used these theories not to retrofit the data to theory, but to explore which theory could provide insights into what I found (Gioia et al., 2012). After some data-theory iteration, I began to explore paradox as a theoretical framework to explain the conflicting feedback-seeking goals entrepreneurs pursued and how they responded to these conflicting goals with specific feedback-seeking strategies. To continue the example from above, at this stage I synthesised the second-order themes "Development goals" and "Protection goals" into an aggregated theoretical dimension labeled

"Feedback-seeking paradox" which indicated the conflicting, yet interdependent relationship between the two higher-order motivations. Not only did paradox theory align closely with the experiences of the entrepreneurs, but it also provided labels for some second-order themes. For example, I adopted the labels "differentiation" to describe short-term feedback-seeking strategies that prioritised goals and "integration" to describe long-term feedback-seeking strategies that combined multiple goals. While paradox emerged as a theoretical lens through the data analysis process, I introduced it in the literature review (Chapter Two) to foreshadow the findings that follow for ease of reading and understanding, similar to other grounded theory studies (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The relationships between first-order categories, second-order sub-themes and themes, and aggregated dimensions are presented in Figure 3.1, which is the progressive data structure resulting from this study (Gioia et al., 2012). The data structure visually describes how I progressed from raw data and the language and experiences of the participating entrepreneurs (i.e. first-order categories) to theoretical dimensions (i.e. aggregated dimensions) that can serve as building blocks of a framework that explains why, why not, and how entrepreneurs seek feedback in relation to venture emergence. The progressive data structure depicts the four main theoretical dimensions that emerged from my analysis at the right side of the figure and moves left toward their constituent second-order sub-themes and themes, and the first-order categories that represented the entrepreneurs' lived experiences. The emerging theoretical dimensions include the feedback-seeking paradox, the feedback-seeking strategies, the feedback-seeking enablers, and the venture emergence paradox.

FIGURE 3.1. PROGRESSIVE DATA STRUCTURE

First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimensions

Development goals

- Experiencing doubt and confusion
- Seeking feedback to confirm choices and directions
- Seeking feedback to select between options
- Seeking feedback to generate options

→ Reduce response uncertainty

- Lack of experience and knowledge
- Seeking feedback to gain knowledge
- Seeking feedback to gain or change skills
- Seeking feedback to adopt or change habits

→ Learn

- Seeking feedback to improve offerings
- Seeking feedback to improve the positioning of offering

→ Improve

- Seeking feedback "to be seen"
- Seeking feedback "to be seen as" responsive
- Seeking feedback "to be seen as" making a difference
- Seeking feedback "to be seen as" engaging

→ Build reputation

Protection goals

- Seeking feedback competes with other activities for resources
- Lack of access to feedback sources
- Lack of access to meaningful feedback

→ Manage resources

- Seeking feedback exposes ideas
- Seeking feedback slows down progress

→ Maintain competitiveness

- Seeking feedback creates tensions with personally significant others
- Seeking feedback creates negative experiences for venture-relevant others

→ Manage relationships

- Seeking feedback exposes mistakes and vulnerabilities
- Seeking feedback equips sources to share negative information

→ Maintain reputation

⟶ Feedback-seeking paradox

- Temporal avoidance
- Source avoidance
- Segmenting feedback sources
- Searching for new feedback sources
- Framing feedback requests

→ Differentiation

- Establishing feedback relationships
- Creating feedback-seeking routines
- Creating feedback channels

→ Integration

⟶ Feedback-seeking strategies

- Considering diverse feedback-seeking goals
- Recognising tensions between feedback-seeking goals
- Pursuing diverse feedback-seeking goals

→ Goal-setting complexity

- Considering diverse feedback-seeking strategies
- Enacting diverse feedback-seeking strategies
- Switching between diverse feedback-seeking strategies

→ Behavioural complexity

- Developing new feedback-seeking goals
- Developing new feedback-seeking strategies
- Improving feedback-seeking strategies

→ Embedding learning

⟶ Feedback-seeking enablers

- Leaving a legacy
- Engaging in personal and professional development
- Growing responsibly

→ Thriving

- "It is only me."
- Limited personal resources
- Being flexible, adaptable, and reactive

→ Coping

⟶ Venture emergence paradox

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3.5.4. Step 4: Model development

The goal of the grounded theory approach is the development of a theoretical model that is grounded in the data and represents individuals' lived experiences in theoretical terms (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, in the final stage of my data analysis I sought to integrate the theoretical dimensions that emerged from the data into a theoretical model that explicates the relationships between the dimensions to describe why, why not, and how entrepreneurs seek feedback.

During this stage of theory development, my analysis suggested that venture emergence triggered feedback seeking. To understand this relationship thoroughly, I became interested in examining how feedback seeking shaped venture emergence. This relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence is also implied in the literature (e.g. Kate & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008), hence this emergent research question was also introduced in the literature review (See Chapter Two). I used four criteria to measure venture emergence 12 months after each entrepreneur joined the research project. First, I used established questions from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor to measure venture survival (i.e. continued active engagement in venture activities) and operational status (i.e. more than three consecutive months of surplus, including the entrepreneur's salary in the costs) as these two criteria are often used to measure venture emergence (e.g. Singer, Amorós & Moska, 2014). I also used innovation and growth as they are traditionally considered hallmarks of entrepreneurial activity (Schumpeter, 1961). I operationalised innovation as an index based on six established questions from the Community Innovation Survey (Eurostat, 2010) related to the introduction of products, services, or processes new to the venture or to the market. I operationalised growth as the number of new employees in the past 12 months.

Given the heterogeneity of progress toward venture emergence, I used a polar sampling strategy and focused this final

TABLE 3.3. SUB-SAMPLE OF MOST AND LEAST SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneur	Industry	Venture age[1]	Development stage at T1	Development stage at T2[2]	Staff at T1	Staff at T2	Innovation index
Peter (WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy)	Health, social and community services Business-related services	19	Ready to sell	Operational	0	4	4
Andrew (Youth Entrepreneurs)	Employment services	22	Prototype	Operational	2	8	5
Daniel H. (Local Works)	Employment services	9	In development	Operational	1	9	3
Angela J. (Able Waves)	Employment services Business-related services	36	Already sell	Operational	0	1	4
Tim (eCare)	Health, social and community services	35	Prototype	Closed	0	N/A	0
Roger (Able Generation)	Employment services	8	Prototype	Dormant	0	N/A	0
Yvette (Education for Today)	Education	168	In development	Dormant	0	N/A	0
Sadie (Active Strength)	Health, social and community services	12	Already sell	Closed	0	N/A	0

[1] Number of months since first firm-founding activity.
[2] 12 months after T1.

stage of data analysis on the most and least successful entrepreneurs to draw and crystalise insights about the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence. My analysis revealed that Peter, Andrew, Daniel H., and Angela J. were the only entrepreneurs in the sample whose ventures achieved operational status, had average or higher innovation scores, and employed at least one new person. At the opposite end of the continuum were Tim, Roger, Yvette, and Sadie whose ventures were disbanded or

became dormant. I present a summary of the most and least successful entrepreneurs' personal and venture characteristics in Table 3.4.

The entrepreneurs' motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback could be best described as a paradox of performing (Smith, 2014; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Instead of engaging with specific feedback-seeking interactions with their respective goals and strategies as a unit of analysis, the paradox literature (Smith, 2014) suggested analysing which goals entrepreneurs pursued and which strategies they leveraged across multiple feedback-seeking interactions. Focusing on the sub-sample of the most and least successful entrepreneurs, I created a matrix with the feedback-seeking goals and strategies that emerged from each entrepreneur's discourse and their progress toward venture emergence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analysing entrepreneurs' overall feedback seeking revealed two insights. First, the most successful entrepreneurs engaged in ambidextrous feedback seeking, which involved both seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback. Second, what enabled the most successful entrepreneurs to engage in ambidextrous feedback seeking were (1) consideration and pursuit of multiple feedback-seeking goals and (2) a wide repertoire of feedback-seeking strategies and switching between and combining them. This concept of a wide repertoire of strategies to draw from in different situations could be best described as "behavioural complexity" (Denison, Hooijberg & Quinn, 1995; Hoojberg, Hunt & Dodge, 1997; Lawrence, Lenk & Quinn, 2009), which I maintained as a label. To maintain consistency and relatedness between these two enablers, I labelled the first one "goal-setting complexity". I synthesised these two second-order themes as a "Feedback-seeking enablers" aggregated dimension. Through an additional round of open and axial coding, "Developing enablers" emerged as a third second-order theme underpinning this aggregated dimension of "Feedback-seeking enablers", thus suggesting the dynamic nature of the two enablers.

**FIGURE 3.2. EMERGENT DYNAMIC MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURS'
AMBIDEXTROUS FEEDBACK SEEKING FOR VENTURE EMERGENCE**

Consequences

Venture emergence

Feedback-seeking enablers

Goal-setting complexity

Behavioural complexity

Feedback-seeking paradox

Ambidextrous feedback seeking

Development goals

Reducing response uncertainty
Learning
Improving
Building reputation

Protection goals

Managing resources
Maintaining competitiveness
Managing relationships
Maintaining reputation

Differentiation strategies to leverage trade-offs

Temporal avoidance
Source avoidance
Segmentation
Searching
Framing

Integration strategies to leverage synergies

Establishing feedback relationships
Creating feedback-seeking routines
Creating feedback channels

Venture emergence paradox

Thriving

Coping

Overall, my analysis informed a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence that captures the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, an overall ambidextrous approach, and consequences of feedback seeking. The model is graphically depicted in Figure 3.2 and provides insights into my initial research questions: *Why do entrepreneurs seek and refrain from seeking feedback?, How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?,* and the emergent question of *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?.*

3.6. Trustworthiness of the findings

While traditional notions of validity and reliability are not directly applicable to assess the rigour of interpretive research, I took several steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and the emergent model (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), thus enhancing my confidence in the plausibility of the interpretations (Gioia et al., 2012). I followed the standards established by exemplar grounded theory studies (e.g. Clark et al., 2010; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2010; Harrison & Corley, 2011) in relation to being transparent about the design process [e.g. recruitment and characteristics of informants (see Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3)], the progression from raw data to theoretical dimensions [e.g. progressive data structure (see Figure 3.1) and data tables (see Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.2, 6.3, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8)], robustness checks (see Section 7.3.1.3), and addressing alternative explanations [e.g. time and industry effects (see Section 8.5.3)] (Eisenhardt, Graebner & Sonenshein, 2016).

In particular, I employed six different strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the findings. First, I took several steps to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity, thus making participants more comfortable to share less socially desirable information. Second, during data collection, I performed a number of checks during initial interviews and in follow-up interviews to clarify and confirm accounts and probe for additional details. Third, the differentiation of first- and second-order categories, sub-themes,

themes, and aggregated dimensions, with evidence presented in data tables, demonstrates how I developed a theory grounded in the lived experiences of the participants based on their language, while maintaining theoretical rigour and parsimony. Fourth, I developed a research report that summarised the findings from the study, shared it with participants, and asked them for feedback in an effort to confirm that my interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. Fifth, I regularly discussed the emergent theoretical insights with my supervisors and peers with relevant research interests (e.g. informal communication, self-directed learning, proactivity). Sixth, I discussed the emergent theoretical model with other researchers and a science-practitioner in one of the support organisations that helped me to recruit participants for the project. These discussions probed for further insights and challenged my interpretations of the data by offering alternative explanations for tentative findings. Overall, my approach to maintaining trustworthiness of the findings was to remain close to the lived experiences and language of the participants and to clarify data and theoretical insights through multiple data checks and discussions with participants, peers, and stakeholders.

3.7. Presentation of the findings

Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven of this doctoral thesis examine in detail each one of the theoretical dimensions that emerged from the data analysis before introducing the emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking. To enhance the reader's confidence in the plausibility of my interpretations and the trustworthiness of the findings, I have employed four data displays to make my research transparent and auditable: 1.) the progressive data structure (see Figure 3.1), 2.) the emergent model (see Figure 3.2), 3.) the findings narrative itself richly supported with examples from the data, and 4.) data tables with aggregated or illustrative data for each second-order theme to

support my interpretations (see Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.2, 6.3, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8).

3.8. Chapter summary

In this chapter, I described in detail the inductive theory building approach I adopted to address the research questions guiding this doctoral thesis: *Why do entrepreneurs seek and refrain from seeking feedback?, How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?,* and *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?* I argued that a grounded theory approach was most appropriate for investigating these research questions because of its fit with the state of knowledge on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and the type of research questions that were core to the project. I elaborated on selecting nascent social entrepreneurs as an extreme context in which to investigate entrepreneurs' feedback seeking because they are in a position to place high value on feedback seeking but also to refrain from seeking feedback due to potential costs. I described in detail the iterative process of data collection, analysis, and consultations with the literature common for a grounded theory approach to develop an emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. Finally, I described the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, which I present in detail in the following four findings chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: TO ASK? DEVELOPMENT GOALS AS DRIVERS OF SEEKING FEEDBACK.

4.1. Introduction

This first findings chapter starts the presentation of the emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence (see Figure 3.2) and contributes to answering the first research question: *Why do entrepreneurs seek* (and refrain from seeking) *feedback?* This findings chapter reveals the four development goals that emerged from my analysis as drivers of feedback seeking for entrepreneurs: to reduce response uncertainty, to learn, to improve, and to build reputation. The chapter starts with details of the content and sources of feedback that emerged from the interviews as a way to contextualise feedback seeking. In the following four sections, I describe how each development goal motivated the entrepreneurs to seek feedback from a variety of individuals on a variety of topics. Each development goal section follows a similar structure: I define and illustrate the specific goal based on the experiences of the entrepreneurs and then discuss the feedback content and sources associated with it. A detailed comparison of the four development goals is presented in Table 4.2. Illustrative data to support the emergent model in relation to the four development goals is presented in empirical tables at the end of each section (see Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6). I conclude with a summary of the findings presented in this chapter and a brief discussion of the four development goals to seek feedback in relation to existing research.

4.2. Contextualising feedback seeking

The emerging literature on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking presents feedback seeking as an act embedded in other phenomena, such as innovating (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015) and navigating the uncertainty inherent in starting new ventures (Sarasvathy, 2001). Due to these portrayals, feedback seeking may

seem as a straightforward act. To contextualise feedback seeking as a more concrete and nuanced phenomenon, I present my findings on two important elements of feedback-seeking interactions – the content of feedback (i.e. what type of information is exchanged on what topics during the interaction) and the sources (i.e. whom entrepreneurs seek feedback from), and use these elements to differentiate between the four development goals that entrepreneurs pursue with feedback seeking in the following sections of this chapter.

4.2.1. Content of feedback

Content of feedback refers to the type of information sought during a feedback-seeking interaction and the topic discussed during a feedback-seeking interaction. My analysis revealed that the entrepreneurs used feedback seeking to gain two types of information on three broad topic areas.

4.2.1.1. Type of feedback

The first element of the content of feedback is type of feedback. The entrepreneurs used the term feedback to refer to two different types of information. First, the entrepreneurs sought information to assess whether their current performance achieved desired goals. They sought feedback about whether a product or service was fit for purpose or whether they managed their employees effectively. Second, the entrepreneurs sought information to guide their future performance with suggestions of how to achieve desired goals. They sought feedback about how to create a product or service fit for purpose or how to manage their employees effectively. Thus, feedback answered two questions: "How am I doing?" and "How can I do better?".

Such differentiation between "How am I doing?" and "How can I do better?" is observed, although rarely addressed, in research in organisational behaviour and entrepreneurship, albeit with different labels. In organisational behaviour, Ashford and

Cummings (1983) differentiate between appraisal feedback, which signals whether the outcome of a performance meets the desired goal, and referent feedback, which identifies the changes in performance required to achieve the goal. In entrepreneurship research, borrowing from psychology (Balzer et al., 1989), Haynie, Shepherd and Patzelt (2012) differentiate between outcome feedback, which is performance information relative to the desired goal, and cognitive feedback, which provides contextual cues about the relationship between the entrepreneur's performance, the goal, and suggestions for improvement, thus highlighting how to achieve the goal in the future. While the concept of cognitive feedback is more specific than referent feedback, both literatures recognise that feedback can focus on the outcome of performance relative to the desired goal (appraisal/outcome feedback) and the process of how to achieve the goal (referent/cognitive feedback). In this thesis, I use the terms outcome and cognitive feedback to elaborate on the drivers of feedback seeking because they have been used in the entrepreneurship context.

4.2.1.2. Topic of feedback

The second element of the content of feedback is topic. My analysis revealed that the entrepreneurs sought outcome or cognitive feedback about three broad topics: strategic decisions; management and operations; and personal style.

First, the entrepreneurs' discourse highlighted that they sought feedback about *strategic decisions* related to building and improving the business models for their ventures. This involved seeking feedback regarding which markets to enter, potential opportunities, and partnerships. The entrepreneurs asked for feedback about sustainable sources of revenue, pricing structures, how and where to find and receive funding and investment, and the cost implications of their offerings. For example, Tim, who was building an enterprise iPad application to support care homes and their activity coordinators and residents, asked a very successful social entrepreneur in the

same sector about the idea of using iPads and how the cost implications of iPad vs Android could limit his market size. When Roger asked for feedback on the viability of his idea to involve at-risk youth from London in international development initiatives in Africa, the feedback he received brought to light the cost implications of this model and the need for large early-stage investment. Finally, the entrepreneurs also asked for feedback about their products or services and how to improve them. In one way or another, the participants sought feedback to shape their overall venture ideas. Angela J.'s story of the early days of her venture was indicative of how seeking feedback helped to shape the business model of the venture, in particular its offering and approach to social impact:

> *bringing different organisations, mostly charities, together into a group to listen to my idea and help to shape it up. There were probably about 20 people identified and at each meeting the number fluctuated but it was about 6 to 8 people at each meeting. They helped me shape the original concept. […] When I first had the idea I thought it would be about helping people with disabilities get better jobs and to be better respected when they went to work. […] [T]he group that I brought in together said that one of the biggest issues for people with disabilities is to raise their own expectations in respect to employment and career opportunities. So for the last year I wanted to tackle that side and I have been developing a programme.*

Second, the entrepreneurs shared incidents of seeking feedback about *managing the ventures and their operations*. These feedback topics focused on the operational aspects of executing strategic decisions about the business model of the venture and the day-to-day running of it. This included seeking feedback on specific marketing and sales approaches to reach markets or expanding to new markets. The entrepreneurs also shared instances of seeking feedback on the practicalities of running a venture, such as financial management, organisational structures, legal form, HR, safety and health policies and procedures. Focusing on the practicalities of running a venture that offered animal-assisted therapy, Sarah asked another social entrepreneur with a similar business for feedback on taking care of the animals and cleaning their cages more effectively

and cost-efficiently. On a similar practical topic, Pradip was concerned with the rent he had to pay:

> *Like this weekend, it was all luck really, but I was talking to a friend who is very senior in her company but she started as an accountant and she knows a lot about that so I asked her whether the amount they want to charge us for rent was high or reasonable. And then she gave me a lot of advice on the financial side of things based on a profit and loss sheet and trying to predict how much profit I can make based on the revenue we can get and then how much we will need to pay for rent and other things.*

Third, the entrepreneurs shared incidents of seeking feedback about *themselves*. Participants' discourse suggested that they asked for feedback on their leadership styles and how to manage, work with, and mobilise employees, volunteers, and partners. For instance, several participants specifically referred to "my personal style and how I work with people" and "[h]ow to supervise, manage and look after people in the organisation." They sought feedback on their approaches to leading and managing the venture and more specific skills and roles related to their entrepreneurial journeys. For example, Olivia asked another artist with a community arts centre about being both an artist and an entrepreneur leading a new venture. The entrepreneurs also shared instances of seeking feedback about individuals or organisations to connect with and events to attend that might be beneficial for themselves or their ventures. Finally, the entrepreneurs sought feedback about their personal lifestyles, wellbeing, work-life balance, and preventing burnout. Some participants emphasised the connection between entrepreneur and venture and sought feedback about their personal lifestyles to improve their work as entrepreneurs. For instance, Colin asked other entrepreneurs for feedback about his lifestyle, including his diet and sleeping patterns, to become more effective in his work. Also focusing on his lifestyle and quality of life, Brendon was more concerned with how his venture was affecting his health and wellbeing, which is why he sought feedback from friends and other social entrepreneurs from his support group.

4.2.2. Sources of feedback

To contextualise entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and tease out its elements, I also examined feedback sources. My analysis revealed a great diversity of feedback sources – the individuals whom entrepreneurs ask for feedback. First, the entrepreneurs revealed they sought feedback from individuals related to the venture in various ways: co-founders, employees, volunteers, current or potential customers, current or potential beneficiaries, funders or investors, and partner organisations. Second, the entrepreneurs' discourse suggested they sought feedback from individuals in the broader entrepreneurship field or specific sectors: (retired) professionals and experts, individuals in position of power, such as policy makers, charity leaders, other social or commercial entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship support organisations. Third, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from individuals from their personal lives, such as family members, friends, mentors, and previous co-workers. Feedback sources could come from more than one domain and perform multiple roles. For example, an entrepreneur's life partner may also be an expert in a given field or an entrepreneur him/herself.

4.3. Development goals to seek feedback

Development goals drive feedback seeking. *Development goals are a second-order theme that I define as desired end-states of new or enhanced capabilities and resources achieved by seeking feedback.* My analysis revealed four development goals to seek feedback based on the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs and differences between underlying motivations, content, and sources of feedback: *reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving,* and *building reputation*. Seeking feedback to pursue development goals enhanced existing or developed new individual or venture capabilities (e.g. entrepreneurs' skills and approaches) and resources (e.g. reputation) that prepared the entrepreneur and the venture to thrive.

TABLE 4.1. DATA STRUCTURE FOR SECOND-ORDER THEME: DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS

First-order categories	Second-order sub-themes	Second-order theme
Experiencing doubt and confusion	Reducing response uncertainty	Development feedback-seeking goals
Seeking feedback to confirm choices and directions		
Seeking feedback to select between options		
Seeking feedback to generate options		
Lack of experience and knowledge	Learning	
Seeking feedback to gain new knowledge		
Seeking feedback to gain or change skills		
Seeking feedback to adopt or change habits		
Seeking feedback to improve offerings	Improving	
Seeking feedback to improve the positioning of the offering		
Seeking feedback "to be seen"	Building reputation	
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" responsive		
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" making a difference		
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" engaging		

The following four sections detail each one of the development goals in terms of their motivation, content, and sources. The similarities and differences between the four development goals across these elements can be seen in Table 4.2. The description of each goal, which is a second-order sub-theme, follows the order of the first-order categories presented in a mini data structure for the development goals only for ease of reading (see Table 4.1).

4.3.1. Reducing response uncertainty

Reducing response uncertainty emerged as the first goal to seek feedback. I define *reducing response uncertainty as the entrepreneurs' intent to minimise feelings of doubt, confusion, and insecurity in relation to possible options and/or the outcomes of*

options. The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that they *experienced doubt and confusion* and attempted to reduce these feelings by *seeking feedback to confirm choices and directions, to select between existing options,* and *to generate new options*, which are the first-order categories I describe next before discussing the content and sources of feedback for this specific development goal.

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs commonly experienced feelings of doubt, confusion, and insecurity because they did not think they could predict future events. The entrepreneurs often spoke about being unsure, confused, lost, lacking in confidence. They experienced dilemmas and questioning that had "gone on and on". For instance, Daniel H. described his experience: "I've gone almost full circle and come back to where my original thinking was." The entrepreneurs found these situations uncomfortable, stressful, and slowing down their decision making and venture emergence progress. These feelings were consistent with the definition of uncertainty commonly accepted in organisational settings as an individual's perceived inability to predict something accurately (Milliken, 1987). More specifically, the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs reflected the concept of "response uncertainty" which is individuals' lack of knowledge of response options and/or an inability to predict the outcomes of response options (Milliken, 1987). Hence I used the label "reducing response uncertainty". In order to minimise these negative feelings and experiences, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to confirm decisions and directions, to select between alternatives, and to generate new alternatives.

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback to confirm their decisions, choices, and directions. The entrepreneurs experienced uncertainty about the ideas, decisions, and approaches that they were undertaking or were about to commit to. They perceived interpersonal feedback seeking as a low cost experiment or a small bet – in their words to "confirm", "prove", "validate", and "test" ideas, decisions, and approaches in the very early stages of the venture emergence process before doing

TABLE 4.2. DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS COMPARISON

	Motivation to seek feedback	Type of feedback	Topic of feedback	Sources of feedback
Response uncertainty reduction goal	To minimise feelings of doubt, confusion and insecurity by confirming decisions, selecting between options, and generating new alternatives	Outcome feedback to confirm or select ideas, decisions, approaches Cognitive feedback to develop new alternatives	Strategic decisions: market, monetisation, and offering design Management and operations: legal structure Personal style: full-time commitment	Customers Beneficiaries Professionals and experts Social entrepreneurs
Learning goal	To acquire or alter knowledge, skills and habits to launch and manage the venture	Cognitive feedback to guide future performance	Strategic decisions: monetisation and processes of product/services design, development, and delivery Management and operations: financial management, health, safety and HR policies and procedures, and marketing, sales, PR and branding Personal style: abilities, skills, approaches, and lifestyle	Social entrepreneurs Commercial entrepreneurs Mentors
Improvement goal	To create better products and services or to position them more effectively on the market by correcting errors or enhancing their appeal or performance	Outcome feedback to assess current state of products or services or their positioning Cognitive feedback to guide future improvement of products or services or their positioning	Strategic decisions: products and services Management and operations: marketing, sales, PR and branding	Beneficiaries Customers Employees and volunteers (as representatives of the beneficiaries) Professionals and experts Social entrepreneurs Commercial entrepreneurs
Reputation building goal	To construct a positive image in front of stakeholders	Both outcome and cognitive feedback are sought, but reputation is mostly created by the perceived meaning of the act	Strategic decisions: products and services Management and operations: decisions	Beneficiaries Customers Employees Volunteers

something on a bigger scale and making significant commitments to a specific direction. They often spoke of questioning what they were doing and needing to "make sure" that "it works", "it is the right thing", "it is the right direction", "on the right path", "on the right track", "it is the right way", "going down the right line". Some of the entrepreneurs started seeking feedback in the early stages of the venture emergence process to "test the waters" about people's need for the offering and their willingness to buy (into) it. For example, Dominic was seeking feedback in the very early stages of his journey to understand whether there was a demand for a service that supported the families of those currently on trial or in prison:

> *Because we are a new project, a new start and we just wanted to know was there a need for the service. Whether there was demand for the service because if there was no demand, it would be pointless. So a lot of our conversations with potential customers and stakeholders was [sic] around is there a demand for this service and if so are you prepared to support it, not necessarily financially, but practically like giving us access to particular environments like courts, etc.*

Reflecting the need to engage the community in delivering the offering, Clinton wanted to confirm whether his idea for a community garden that provided access to fresh produce for the borough was appealing to those in the community:

> *We only started this activity, or I started with the idea probably at the mid point of last year, so late April time, and there was a period of speaking to people in the community and carrying out discussions and relatively low form of engagement to understand if there was a need and an interest beyond my own personal identification of the need and of this as a solution. So that was carried out throughout a number of months last year.*

The entrepreneurs experienced response uncertainty not only about the desirability of their offerings to potential customers, beneficiaries, and contributors, but also about how their offerings were positioned and marketed to potential customers and beneficiaries. For example, Andrew highlighted his need to seek feedback from professionals in the education sector:

> *Education, for example, there is terminology that they use to describe all these things and so it seems like they speak a*

different language. So it is about understanding where all these specialised communities come from and the way that they understand ... so having being only a pupil and a student, but never worked in education, I am coming from outside and I need to make sure that what I am expressing they can understand.

These feelings of response uncertainty did not disappear after the entrepreneurs had decided to develop a specific offering. Even in the later stages when they were already delivering a service or selling a product, they experienced response uncertainty about the business model as a whole and its viability. Olivia's story demonstrated this experience. She was starting a community arts centre that provided space for artists but also made art more accessible to the community. Following a "very American" model to community art centres, she took a trip to Los Angeles to get feedback on whether she was developing the centre in "the right way" and to gain insights from two similar organisations there. Upon returning from the trip, she reflected:

> *it kind of made me really go home and think "Well, actually it is a sustainable project and with time I'll be able to access all of those people and be able to be self-sustaining." […] For me there was a lot of validation of my development and the direction that I was going. So when I was speaking with people who'd been doing this for like over 20 years or over 10 years or so and I was saying "Okay, this is my project, this is what I'm doing," it was in line with what they were doing and that made me feel "Okay, great, I don't have a lot of work to do."*

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback when they were "at crossroads" and needed to make decisions and select between alternatives. They experienced response uncertainty when selecting between different options and were not sure what each option meant or how to decide between them. Feeling unsure, confused, and switching between options was common when the entrepreneurs faced meaningful decisions or surprises. Daniel H.'s experience of deciding about the legal form of his venture highlighted the feelings of doubt and confusion that motivated the entrepreneurs to seek feedback. Daniel H. was planning to seek investment for his venture that helped people to (re-)enter the labour market. His social

venture had two arms: an employability support arm that catalysed social impact and a recruitment agency that generated income to support the employability work. His venture was registered as a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee, which did not allow for investment. Daniel H. knew he had to change the legal form of the venture in order to get investment, but he could not decide which legal form was the best option for them considering what would be appealing to investors, the opportunities to catalyse social impact, the protection of the two arms of the venture, and tax efficiency. The options he considered were strictly becoming a company limited by shares and splitting the venture into different entities:

> *But that sort of questioning has gone on and on […] It's a very important part, you know, whether we decide to split or not and then what structures we do adopt if we do or don't. So I'm a little bit lost and I don't want to make the wrong decision, but we need to make a decision and we need to get on with it […] So the things that, I suppose, guide that decision making are both internal – what we want as a business and what works for us and that might vary across my board of directors – and then the other influencing factor is what would investors want and what's going to be the best way of securing the investment that we need. So it's external, if you like, and that I definitely can't answer because I'm not an investor.*

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback to generate entirely new alternatives. The entrepreneurs sought feedback when they experienced response uncertainty about specific situations and decisions but did not have any options to consider. In these cases, they were seeking feedback on what they had achieved so far to generate alternatives and ideas to select from. This happened when they did not know how to go about making a decision or in ventures that involved the community very heavily. For example, both Colin and Sam had developed offerings that were catalysing social impact and they were confident in the social impact aspects of their ventures. However, both of them did not know how to create an offering that would generate income. Sam was not sure how to use the data his platform was generating to package it into something that social services, third-sector organisations, and even

for-profit corporations would pay for. He started seeking feedback from experts and professionals about "what to do with the data, how we are going to shape it to actually offer something to our customers in a way that will benefit them." Colin was in a slightly different, yet similar position. His venture had a more integrated approach of hiring young people from the creative industries to work on media projects for large companies. Although the venture was catalysing social impact, it was not financially sustainable and Colin and his co-founder did not know what changes they had to make to generate surplus. To reduce the response uncertainty, Colin started seeking feedback from his numerous mentors who suggested several business model changes.

4.3.1.1. Content of feedback

In terms of content of feedback, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to reduce response uncertainty with a stronger focus on outcome type of feedback and strategic decisions as a main topic. The entrepreneurs sought feedback in the early stages of the venture emergence process and when making meaningful decisions, reflected in the topics of the feedback. My analysis indicated that in terms of topics, the participants sought feedback to reduce response uncertainty mostly about their strategic decisions. This included the monetisation of the offering (e.g. whether the venture could be financially sustainable, how much to charge), the design of the offering, and the market for the offering. Although less often, the entrepreneurs also asked for feedback on the management and operations level (e.g. selecting and changing legal forms) and on the personal style level (e.g. committing to the venture full time). My analysis indicated that they sought outcome type of feedback when confirming ideas, decisions, and approaches or when selecting between alternatives. They sought cognitive type of feedback only when generating new alternatives.

4.3.1.2. Sources of feedback

The entrepreneurs' feedback seeking to reduce response uncertainty was most commonly associated with four types of feedback sources. First, the participants sought feedback from customers and beneficiaries because in many cases the outcome of the decision depended on their reactions. They were often also used to generate new alternatives. Reflecting the need to seek feedback from highly experienced individuals when selecting between alternatives, the entrepreneurs also approached professionals and experts for feedback, as well as other social entrepreneurs.

TABLE 4.3. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: REDUCING RESPONSE UNCERTAINTY

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Experiencing doubt and confusion	"my lack of confidence" — Tim "if I am sure I am right then I don't want feedback." – Selena "So I'm a little bit lost and I don't want to make the wrong decision" – Daniel H.
Seeking feedback to confirm choices and decisions	"It confirmed that the subtitles were worth it because at one point I wasn't sure." — Samantha "But I took it back to them in September and they were all "Oh, that's fantastic. I can see what you are doing. I can see what you are getting at." I got such positive feedback from them so again it made me think 'I know I am on the right track. Maybe it is not the right thing for everyone, but I know for people who like animals it is.'" — Sarah
Seeking feedback to select between options	"when we were choosing the opening times for the summer we didn't know whether to open earlier in the day or to stay open until later in the day. So we used coffee beans in mugs to ask people what they preferred so we were open from 7 in the morning until 8 in the evening." — Lisa "So as these two revision companies are interested, once I get an offer from them I will go to all these people about what to do next." – Selena
Seeking feedback to generate options	"what to do with the data, how we are going to shape it to actually offer something to our customers in a way that will benefit them, but also the users" – Sam "I got people to tell what days of the week would make more sense, what kind of provision they want, what they'll be prepared to pay for it, what they'll use the space for" – Angela N. "We reach to the community for ideas, for service development, and to continue working on achieving our vision." – Lauren

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4.3.2. Learning

Learning emerged as the second goal to seek feedback. I define *learning as acquiring or altering knowledge, skills, and habits to launch and manage new ventures.* The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that they perceived to *lack experience and knowledge* and seeking feedback was considered as a way to address this issue. They *sought feedback to gain new knowledge, gain or change skills,* and *adapt or change habits*, which are the first-order categories I describe next as they underpin this sub-theme. I finish the description of this development goal with a discussion of the content and sources of feedback seeking to learn.

The entrepreneurs perceived they lacked experience, knowledge, and preparation to launch and manage a venture effectively. They often described starting their ventures as a "journey" of stepping into a "new world" where they knew nothing and had "no experience". Continuing with the journey metaphor, the entrepreneurs described starting a venture as a "massive departure" and compared it to the skills they had gained in their previous jobs. They also recognised the realities of their journeys and the "need to get better." As Angela N. summarised her lack of financial management skills: "You notice, I have a terrible time talking about money, but I have to be commercially viable." In order to navigate their journeys, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to gain knowledge, gain or alter skills, and adopt or alter habits.

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback to gain knowledge about specific spheres they felt unprepared for or inexperienced in. For many of the entrepreneurs, starting a venture was something they did not have experience with. They considered feedback seeking as an essential element of the learning process because it helped them to gain new knowledge. They included feedback seeking in their repertoire of learning activities such as formal courses, workshops, and conferences. Samantha's recollection of her journey and why she sought feedback reflected this need for knowledge:

Here we are. Not only am I starting a social enterprise but it is a social enterprise in a world I know nothing about. I know about education. I know about teaching people. I've got no idea about animation, or the film world, or media, or how to get it out there, or to go on YouTube. […] I still don't know enough. I still don't know about shares, equity. I didn't know what a limited company was. What I do know is when I made the decision, I spoke to the right people.

Greg echoed this sentiment:

[…] how completely like a fish out of water I feel. Everything... I've been a teacher for 20 years. So I went to school, went to college, went to university, went back to school. Actually trying to start a business is a massive departure from everything that I know.

While for some entrepreneurs seeking feedback to gain new knowledge was driven by their lack of experience, for others this need escalated because of the complexity of their ideas. Daniel S.'s reflection highlighted the need to learn about the general aspects of running a venture, but also to learn about the specific disciplines that underpinned his idea and could make it successful:

I came from a job in central government where I worked on some very high level initiatives with policymakers and ministers, but none of those skills were helpful here. I didn't know anything about website or any other kind of design or branding or how to write for the internet. […] It is very ambitious what I am trying to do and there are so many areas of it like branding, marketing, sales, the psychology that is underpinning it because it is about behavioural change and that is psychology, which is something I am interested in but you know people spend their entire lives studying any one of these parts and I have all of that plus a business to run. So it feels like a lot to do and I think the problem of that is that I need to talk to more people from specific disciplines at times just to get their views and get their feedback on specific areas of the business.

My analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback when they needed to gain specific new skills or add to existing skills in order to run their ventures more effectively and successfully. They actively pursued development opportunities and interpersonal feedback seeking was seen as one pathway to develop themselves and their abilities. They sought feedback about their leadership skills, working with, managing, and mobilising employees and volunteers.

Lisa's frustration with the lack of feedback in her own venture highlighted this issue:

> So I am the general manager managing a team of 3 managers and a team of 18 people. And I don't get any supervision or feedback at all and I've never done this before on my own. And I think that is something we need to address. So I've had to go and ask for feedback from other places from people who are like mentors.

My analysis also suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback to adopt or alter habits. For a few participants, learning through feedback seeking included making changes to their lifestyles. These changes to habits occurred in an effort to become more productive in leading and managing the venture, but also to retain a level of wellbeing and to prevent burnout. For instance, Colin changed his sleeping patterns and diet after seeking feedback from his mentors on how to become more productive. Recognising that if he was not healthy, he would not be productive and will not be able to support his beneficiaries, Brandon used the feedback from his peer support group to start going to regular massages and even booked a wellness retreat:

> I wouldn't even be thinking about going on a wellness retreat. It sounded a bit fluffy. It is not the type of thing I would normally consider but four people, four different individuals, all said to me "You should try this because it will get you away from the day-to-day stuff and recharge your batteries and help you think about things." And people have told me that before so I go for regular massages and that has also been suggested through group involvement. People have given me feedback and said "Oh, why don't you go get a massage? Don't be afraid to pamper yourself a bit." It is not the type of thing that a Scottish man would typically think of doing.

Learning was not only a goal for novice entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs with previous start-up experience either with commercial, social, community or environmental ventures shared the need to seek feedback in order to develop or alter knowledge, skills or habits. Andrew's statement made this point explicit:

> This is my second company but I am still learning to understand all aspects of the business from marketing and sales to managing resources, accounting, legal. So I regularly seek

feedback [...] I mean I've never built websites before, never developed software or ran workshops before. I've never developed an educational programme before.

4.3.2.1. Content of feedback

In terms of content of feedback, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to learn about all three topic areas and focused on cognitive type of feedback: strategic decisions, management and operations, and personal style. Feedback seeking about strategic decisions was focused on monetisation, such as revenue streams, pricing structures, and profit margins. Also about strategic decisions, the participants' discourse suggested seeking feedback about the products and services they were developing, focusing on learning about the processes of designing, developing, and delivering these products and services. Feedback seeking about management and operations for learning purposes was focused on financial management, infrastructure, such as HR, health and safety policies and procedures, and marketing, sales, PR and branding. Finally, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to learn about developing their skills and approaches to managing the venture, leadership styles, and lifestyle. Across these three topic areas, the entrepreneurs focused on cognitive feedback in terms of processes and how-to information in order to guide future performance and changes for the venture or the individual.

4.3.2.2. Sources of feedback

The entrepreneurs' feedback seeking to learn was most commonly associated with three main types of feedback sources. First, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from other social entrepreneurs. Second, recognising that starting a social venture may not be very different in terms of management and operations, the social entrepreneurs sought feedback from commercial entrepreneurs. Finally, the participants' discourse suggested that they asked their mentors for feedback in order to learn. While some entrepreneurs had social or commercial entrepreneurs as mentors, for many others, the mentors were established professionals in

TABLE 4.4. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: LEARNING

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Lack of experience and knowledge	"I talk to people about this all the time because I know I don't have the answers and people who have been successful might have answers that apply to me. I always... I don't think this is helpful, but I am always asking for feedback because I haven't done this before." — Pradip "Here we are. Not only am I starting a social enterprise but it is a social enterprise in a world I know nothing about. I know about education. I know about teaching people. I've got no idea about animation, or the film world, or media, or how to get it out there, or to go on YouTube." — Samantha "For me to be honest because I've never run an organisation before, I've never employed people before." – Brandon
Seeking feedback to gain new knowledge	"Well, I met the founder of Inner City Arts. He also still teaches and for the most part I haven't taught during as I've been running my programmes. I've brought artists in thinking that I needed to wear just one hat only, that I couldn't do both, I couldn't be director and artist, and he was director and artist, so I asked him was it a conscious decision to be both and how does he manage it, how does he find the balance, how does he do it." — Olivia "So learning about like ... Quite literally sitting back and think "Right, I've got this. Where do I begin?" Instead of it being one thing, it is 10 things marching towards you or marching with you. And one of them is have you got barcodes? And then you realise that any product that needs to be sold needs a barcode. You think "Of course it does. Where do I get a barcode from?" So on the one hand you are learning little things like "How do I buy a barcode?" which now I know and then the big things like registering the business with the correct official body so you are not breaking the law and then it's explaining it to potential customers." — Greg
Seeking feedback to gain or change skills	"definitely understanding where your weaknesses are. I mean I've never built websites before, never developed software or ran workshops before. I've never developed an educational programme before." - Andrew "Really good feedback about how you present yourself, how you present your business case to organisations effectively." – Dominic
Seeking feedback to adopt or change habits	"Business is a lifestyle not just something... Especially if you are an entrepreneur, when you start a business, it is not something you can just switch on and off. It is more a part of your lifestyle. So the way you live, the food you eat, the amount of hours you sleep... It all contributes to your productivity and I've had various mentors to help me with that and help me understand what I was doing wrong and how to improve my lifestyle to improve my performance." – Colin "Something where the workload goes up so much that I can't deal with it so seeking feedback on how to streamline things, free up some time, etc." – Peter

commercial settings with experience in marketing or banking. The entrepreneurs sought feedback from these individuals because of their previous experience of dealing with similar problems successfully or having the professional expertise to do so.

4.3.2.3. Differentiating response uncertainty reduction and learning goals

The goals to reduce response uncertainty and to learn emerged from the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs and can be differentiated across three dimensions: purpose, content, and sources. The first conceptual difference between the two goals relates to their fundamental purpose. Reducing response uncertainty captures entrepreneurs' intentions to reduce feelings of doubt and confusion in relation to possible options and/or the outcomes of options, thus it refers to decision making. The learning goal captures entrepreneurs' attempts to acquire and change knowledge, skills, and habits to actually implement decisions and options. This difference in purpose is also evident in the type and topics of feedback sought, which is the second difference between the two goals. When pursuing the response uncertainty reduction goal, the entrepreneurs focused on seeking outcome feedback on strategic decisions more often and they sought cognitive feedback only to generate new alternatives. When pursuing the learning goal, the entrepreneurs sought only cognitive feedback to guide future performance across the full spectrum of feedback topics. The third conceptual difference between the two goals relates to the common feedback sources approached for each goal. When pursuing the response uncertainty reduction goal, the entrepreneurs sought feedback mostly from customers, beneficiaries, experts and professionals as often the outcome of the decision depended on their reactions. However, when pursuing the learning goal, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from other social or commercial entrepreneurs and mentors as they were perceived to have experience with similar issues and situations as the entrepreneurs.

In addition to using feedback seeking as a pathway to learning, the entrepreneurs also considered it as a pathway to improving, which I describe in the next section.

4.3.3. Improving

Improving emerged as the third goal to seek feedback. I define *improving as creating better products or services or positioning them more effectively in the market by correcting errors and enhancing appeal or performance.* The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that they *sought feedback to improve the offering* and *to improve the positioning of the offering*, which are the first-order categories underlying this second-order sub-theme and I describe them in detail next.

The entrepreneurs' discourse emphasised the importance of designing and delivering a good product or service for the success of the venture. The entrepreneurs considered the development of a high-quality offering to be essential for achieving the venture's social and commercial objectives. Without an effective and desirable offering, the entrepreneurs did not think they could catalyse social impact for their beneficiaries or gain enough customers to create a financially sustainable venture. This is why they asked for feedback on their products and services throughout the process: from just an idea for an offering through designing a prototype and even when they were selling or delivering the product or service. For many entrepreneurs, seeking feedback to correct errors and enhance the offering was "the only way" they could provide "a proper service" to their beneficiaries. They also considered seeking feedback to improve the offerings and their positioning as essential to gain customers and revenues. Many of the entrepreneurs recognised that the social and commercial aspects of their ventures were interlinked and they could not catalyse social impact without financial sustainability nor could they generate income without creating offerings that were desirable and served their purpose.

In order to improve the design and positioning of their offerings, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to remain objective and understand the perspectives of the customers and beneficiaries. The entrepreneurs realised that being embedded in their ventures might make it difficult to detach, critically evaluate, and examine the design

and positioning of their offerings in an objective manner. This sentiment was strongly expressed by the entrepreneurs who started their ventures due to a personal pain or need for the offering. These entrepreneurs perceived their personal experiences to be limiting their objectivity and ability to see their work from different perspectives. As Peter highlighted:

> *Also because I suffered the addiction and now I work in the field, I need to make sure I constantly stay objective rather than just passionate about an area that affected me. […] I think that is even more important when you are a one-man band to build it because when you live it, sleep it, breathe it and everything else and you are the organisation, the lines get blurry and your head becomes fuzzy, so I think feedback is absolutely essential for me.*

To improve the design and positioning for their offerings, the entrepreneurs sought feedback on various aspects of their products and services: from names and features to positioning. Some of them recognised that they were not the customers or beneficiaries of their offerings and needed to understand them better to improve their products or services. For instance, Sam realised very early in the venture emergence process that he and his co-founder did not know the target beneficiary group well enough to implement their idea of a mobile application that supported young people's wellbeing through anonymous sharing of secrets. Consequently, they asked a group of young people for feedback and started with the name of the platform. Additionally, examples of seeking feedback to make changes to the features of existing products were abundant in the data. Tim planned on going to a care home to ask activity coordinators who would use his iPad application for feedback about the features and the usability of the product. Selena aimed to create a fun and enjoyable game that helped students with their learning of economics and was also useful for teachers. She had conversations with multiple students about the board of her game, the colours, questions, spaces, and parts. She asked teachers who would be the customers about the resources they would want to be bundled with the game. Additionally, she asked for feedback from her economics professor about the effectiveness of

questions in the game and how to match the content to the material studied in economics classes around the world.

Asking for feedback to improve the offering was not only for those entrepreneurs who offered a product. It was also common for those who offered a service to their beneficiaries and customers. Building on her work to support people with disabilities into employment, Josie H. also started a series of events and conferences. She aimed to make each one of them accessible to individuals with disabilities and she asked for feedback before and after the events. Seeking feedback helped her identify that while she was doing a great job of making the events accessible to people with physical disabilities, such as visual impairment, the presentations were not always accessible to individuals with dyslexia. Roger had a similar experience of seeking feedback from his beneficiaries to create a better employability programme for at-risk youth. For example, he asked for feedback about the types of employers he connected the youths with, the number of work placements he provided for them, and even the types of skills he helped them to develop. In some cases, seeking feedback to improve the service required not just assessment of the service but also a better understanding of the social problem. For example, Angela J. started seeking feedback to improve her employability service for people with disabilities, however, after a feedback encounter with a beneficiary she realised that the positioning of the services needed to be improved, not the service itself. Andrew realised that in order to involve marginalised youth in engaging and fun enterprise education he needed to engage with their teachers first. He asked for feedback about the service from a team of social entrepreneurs from Gdansk whose venture had a similar purpose and from academics in education in Glasgow who understood the education system.

Entrepreneurs who perceived their offerings to be very complex and novel heavily stressed that they sought feedback to improve their products or services because they did not have any exemplars to copy or use as a benchmark. For example, Daniel S. considered his web platform, which made living a greener life easier through

discounts for eco-friendly products and services, tools, and information, to be unique. This meant that he had no one to copy or learn from and he considered seeking feedback to be the only way to improve his platform. Building a consultancy that addressed problem gambling through increasing awareness, training, and support in organisations, Peter shared a similar experience:

> *With something as new as this, I think it is the only way I can improve. By gaining that feedback. […] I am bringing something entirely new to the market and I had to develop it from the ground up. I don't have a model to follow. I don't have a business to try to copy. […] You know, if I were doing a drugs consultancy, or a drinks consultancy, or an accounting consultancy, or something, there are so many others I can look up to and compare it to.*

4.3.3.1. Content of feedback

In terms of content of feedback, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to improve about two topic areas and focused on both types of feedback. The entrepreneurs sought feedback about the design and delivery of their products and services, which is a strategic decision, and about the positioning and marketing of these products, which are management and operations feedback topics. They sought both outcome and cognitive types of feedback to assess the offerings and their positing and to collect suggestions about how to improve them.

4.3.3.2. Sources of feedback

The entrepreneurs' feedback seeking to improve was commonly associated with seven main feedback sources. First, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from customers and beneficiaries because they were considered to be the decision-makers on whether the offering was of high quality. As Josie H. reflected, "It doesn't matter what I think. It matters what our employers [as customers] and our beneficiaries think." Second, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from their employees and volunteers who were either beneficiaries or had the characteristics of the venture's beneficiaries, thus considered them as representatives with experience. Third, my analysis revealed

TABLE 4.5. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: IMPROVING

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback to improve the offering	"With the young people, what is most important for me... I am very clear with them that this is a pilot and encourage them to criticise, scrutinise, say what does or doesn't work. Say what is missing that will make it better, enhance their experience and skills" — Roger "the opportunity to talk to people and get their feedback on what we are doing before we do something bigger and so change what we will be doing to meet what people want" – Pradip "Because the market is not going very well, we are doing a consultation next week with people about how we develop the market in the future" – Angela N.
Seeking feedback to improve the positioning of the offering	"To improve what I've got now. Just to improve the [promotional] videos" — Selena "Sometimes I tell them "I've done this for the website, will you have a look at it and feed back on whether it fits the target." or something to do with their own industry because one of the organisations is a really big marketing company in Birmingham. So he's got an eye for marketing and he'll give me plenty of feedback if I ask him "What do you think about the way I am marketing this?" and he will tell me whether he thinks that will work or not." – Angela J. "When I write a blog, I ask her [his wife] "What do you think of this?" or "What do you think of this wording?". Because the tone is just so important. You need reviewers, absolutely need reviewers." – Daniel S.

that in order to improve their products and services, the entrepreneurs asked professionals and experts for feedback. Finally, in rare cases the entrepreneurs asked other social or commercial entrepreneurs for feedback on their products and services.

4.3.3.3. Differentiating learning and improving goals

While there was some overlap in terms of seeking feedback on products and services for both learning and improving, there were two main differences between the two development goals. First, when engaged in learning, the entrepreneurs sought feedback on the process of how to design, develop, and deliver their products or services. When they were concerned with improvement, they sought feedback on product or service names, features, usability, usefulness, or positioning, thus focusing on the results of the development process. Second, the analysis also suggested differences in the type of feedback that the entrepreneurs sought. When they were engaged in feedback seeking for learning, they

sought cognitive feedback, however, when they were engaged in improving, they asked for both outcome and cognitive feedback. Their discourse suggested that they often started with outcome feedback assessing their products and services and then asked for elaborations, clarifications, and suggestions for future improvements, thus also gaining cognitive feedback.

Beyond seeking feedback to achieve goals related to the launch and management of a venture, the entrepreneurs also sought feedback to build reputation.

4.3.4. Building reputation

Building reputation emerged as the last goal to seek feedback. I define b*uilding reputation as the entrepreneurs' motivation to seek feedback to construct a positive internal and external image amongst key individuals, such as customers, beneficiaries, employees, volunteers, funders, and investors.* The entrepreneurs recognised that being perceived in a positive light by internal and external audiences was beneficial for their ventures. They engaged in activities to enhance or maintain a perception of high esteem and regard of both themselves and their ventures. Feedback seeking was one of the activities they used to build such a positive image. The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed they sought feedback *"to be seen"* in general, as well as in a specific light, such as *"to be seen as"* *responsive, making a difference,* and *engaging.* These in-vivo codes represented the first-order categories underpinning the reputation building goal and I describe them in detail next.

First, my analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback "to be seen" by others. They considered that seeking feedback helped them to become more visible amongst customers, beneficiaries, and potential partners. Seeking feedback allowed them to raise awareness and gain attention from others. It was considered a safe and low-cost tactic to approach key stakeholders. For example, Josie B. perceived feedback seeking "as another way to raise awareness about my organisation". Angela N. and Dominic

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echoed a similar approach of feedback seeking as "a form of marketing" that allowed "people to see that we exist". In these cases, feedback seeking was a way to increase awareness that the venture even existed before they started building a specific reputation.

Second, my analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback "to be seen as" responsive and adaptive to the needs of customers and beneficiaries. They considered that seeking feedback shaped how others perceived them and the first particular characteristic they wanted to actively portray to others was as ventures that were responsive to the needs of their customers and beneficiaries and these needs were at the core of what the venture did. For example, Jennifer did not "want to be thought of as charging through" by her beneficiaries, while Josie H. specifically wanted to build an image of "responsiveness" with her customers and beneficiaries:

> *a deaf candidate who wants to access our webinars and the webinars are slides they can see on their screen and then they can hear my voice. But he can't hear my voice because he is deaf. And we couldn't find a way around that because I can't put subtitles on because it changes every time because it is live. So together we found a company that will do live captioning. So they will listen to me and type it really quickly so he can read it while looking at my slides and their transcripts of what I am saying. And that would have been a really good case study to say "Look how responsive we are. How great we are."*

Third, my analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback in order "to be seen as" credible ventures that made a difference and catalysed social impact. In these cases, seeking feedback was very much about generating positive "testimonials" and "evidence" to demonstrate that the venture catalysed social change. The generated content was then used with a broader audience to showcase the quality of the venture's work, thus gaining loyalty and support, tangible or intangible. For example, Jennifer was gathering feedback to "show whether this can help improve people's quality of life". Andrew and Clara had a similar approach and used the feedback they gained as "an opportunity to showcase to external stakeholders" "that what we do is unique and different". These pieces

of feedback were used in funding applications, websites, presentations, and talks. For example, Samantha had engaged a small group of pupils to watch her animations and give her feedback in the form of pictures and notes. She was going to put the pupils' feedback on marketing materials, such as websites and promotional presentations.

Sam took a slightly different approach to how he aimed to use feedback seeking in order to build an image of quality and making a difference. He thought he did not know enough about his beneficiaries or potential customers so he built a small group of young co-creators to give feedback on a regular basis "about different parts of the project that we don't have much experience in". However, he also decided he could leverage the fact that he had this co-creators group of young people to "give us more credibility". He was not necessarily using the content of the feedback that they gave him to demonstrate the quality of the social impact, but was borrowing the credibility of the co-creators to showcase that the product was created with the help of people who represented the beneficiaries, thus were in a better position to build a product that met their needs.

Finally, my analysis suggested that the entrepreneurs sought feedback "to be seen as" engaging. They considered that others may appreciate entrepreneurs who seek feedback, and thus experience a sense of ownership and develop stronger relationships. The entrepreneurs considered how seeking feedback could make others feel more valued and involved in the venture emergence process. They hoped that these positive experiences would help them to gain access to additional tangible or intangible support from these individuals in the future. Angela N. indicated this instrumental potential of feedback seeking to involve customers and beneficiaries in the venture emergence process:

> It helps make people feel invested in the project. I need to get them to think about offering assistance and wanting to be involved.

While for some entrepreneurs feedback seeking was used to build a reputation of engaging amongst their customers and beneficiaries, for others it was used to create the same benefits with employees and volunteers. Josie H. reflected on this approach:

> *Because I think when there was just me and Lewis, Lewis just put the jobs on the board, so really in terms of any decisions it was just my decision and now that there are more of us and remote – so one lives in Buckinghamshire, one in Devon, one not far from here and then me here in the Midlands – it's how you keep a team feeling like a team even though they work completely on their own and are isolated. So I've had to look at... they don't need motivating because they're already motivated, but how to keep people engaged and involved and make sure that I don't just go off and make decisions without making other people feel involved as part of the team.*

4.3.4.1. Content of feedback

In terms of content of feedback, the entrepreneurs sought feedback to build reputation about two topic areas with both cognitive and outcome types of feedback. First, they sought feedback from customers and beneficiaries about strategic decisions in terms of their products or services so they could use any positive feedback as "evidence" to demonstrate the quality of their work and how they made a difference to individuals and communities. Second, they sought feedback from their employees and volunteers when making decisions about management and operations. The entrepreneurs sought both cognitive and outcome types of feedback to build reputation. However, the content of the feedback in terms of topic and type was often irrelevant for building reputation.

Both the act of seeking feedback and the content of the feedback can play a role in achieving development goals. The entrepreneurs often sought feedback because they appreciated the instrumental value of feedback. They valued feedback as a specific type of information that helped them to reduce feelings of doubt and confusion, gain or adapt knowledge, skills, and habits, or improve their venture's offerings. They sought feedback to receive feedback. However, the reputation building goal demonstrated that entrepreneurs also sought feedback because they valued how others

TABLE 4.6. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: BUILDING REPUTATION

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback "to be seen"	"I think of it as another way of raising awareness about my organisation as well." — Josie B. "I think particularly commissioning groups and people who'll be funding the service. Those are the key people I want to get feedback from in the next few weeks if this is what they'd expect, what they might want because that also builds the relationship" – Eva "What we've done is we've set up a couple of open consultations. We made contact with a local organisation and they gave us space in their community centre and it was promoted quite widely in the area. We sort of knew we'd struggle to get people because people don't know us but what we wanted to do is get a heartbeat and get people to see this is available." – Dominic
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" responsive	"I like to know that I am doing the right thing. Definitely that. I wouldn't want to be thought of as charging through, thinking I've got it right when I haven't." — Jennifer "If we are saying to our stakeholders, whichever group it is, "We need to know what you think, and we are interested in what you think, and we want to make things better for you." then that strengthens our relationships with them because it makes them think that we are responsible and responsive " – Josie H.
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" making a difference	"it's essential to list it and to record it because it shows funders in the future as well. It doesn't just improve the current situation but it means that funders can see how serious you are about quality as well" —Angela J. "So I'm really about collecting just a few very positive stories and then hopefully being able to share that should help encourage other people to get on board and see that the model we have does what it's supposed to do." — Roger
Seeking feedback "to be seen as" engaging	"So I'm learning, I think, to make much more of an effort to inform but also engage in terms of, you know, "What do you think? Do you think this would be a good idea?" so that they feel as though they're part of the decision making and not just doing a job and they feel pride." – Josie H. "But I think in the longer term some of the gains and some of the advantages will be more powerfully embedded in what the project is and people will again feel more connected and have a great sense of personal ownership of the project and more community involvement. " — Clinton

would perceive the act of feedback seeking itself. The act of seeking feedback could have an instrumental value in itself beyond its purpose to access feedback. Sometimes entrepreneurs sought feedback not because they valued the content, instead they valued how only the act of seeking feedback would be judged by others and leveraged these perceptions of the act to be seen as being responsive and engaging. Thus both the content and the act of

feedback seeking could help entrepreneurs to achieve different development goals and had independent instrumental value.

4.3.4.2. Sources of feedback

In order to construct a reputation of entrepreneurs and ventures as responsive, making a difference, and engaging, the participants sought feedback from four main groups of individuals. First, the entrepreneurs asked for feedback from beneficiaries and customers because their feedback was considered to weigh the most and provide credibility for the ventures' work. Second, the entrepreneurs sought feedback from employees and volunteers in order to be seen as engaging them in the venture emergence process and strengthening their sense of ownership and involvement. While feedback for the purpose of building a reputation was sought from a smaller group of individuals compared to the other development feedback-seeking goals, when the feedback was used, it was shared with large internal and external audiences using a variety of media, such as websites, presentations, funding applications, and printed materials.

4.4. Chapter summary and discussion

In this first findings chapter I focused on addressing a part of the first research question that guided this thesis: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback?* In addressing this question I identified four development goals that drove entrepreneurs to seek feedback based on the experiences of the participating entrepreneurs. My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs sought feedback to reduce response uncertainty, to learn, to improve offerings and their positioning, and to build reputation. These development goals represented desired end-states of new or enhanced capabilities and resources that the entrepreneurs could achieve by seeking feedback. Each one of the development goals was associated with different feedback purpose, content, and sources, as summarised in Table 4.2. Therefore, these findings provide a more nuanced, contextualised, and detailed

understanding of feedback seeking that highlights that entrepreneurs seek feedback for multiple reasons and why they seek feedback shapes how they do so: what type of feedback they seek on what topics and from whom. In particular, these findings enrich our conceptualisation of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking in two significant ways in relation to uncertainty and the overlooked functions of feedback seeking, which I address next.

First, my findings suggest that feedback seeking is an additional way for entrepreneurs to reduce uncertainty. My findings provide a new way for entrepreneurs to minimise feelings of doubt and confusion to take action in relation to multiple topics. While uncertainty is inherent in entrepreneurship (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), response uncertainty, as a particular type of uncertainty, can also decreases individuals' willingness to pursue an idea for a new venture, product or service (McKelvie, Haynie & Gustavsson, 2011). Feedback seeking can reduce response uncertainty for entrepreneurs by helping them to confirm decisions and approaches, select between options, and generate new options. Seeking feedback to reduce response uncertainty offers new insights into how entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty in relation to effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008) and fast strategic decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989).

My findings suggest that when engaged in effectuation, entrepreneurs can reduce response uncertainty by seeking feedback about different topics through three different pathways. Effectuation suggests that entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty through co-creation. It proposes that to understand the outcomes of options, entrepreneurs expose product prototypes and service pilots to users, customers, and other stakeholders early in the design process to gain their commitments and support for the offering (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008). My findings enrich our understanding of how entrepreneurs reduce response uncertainty through effectual co-creation in two different ways. First, my findings elaborate on the different ways co-creating and seeking feedback can reduce response uncertainty: confirming decisions and approaches,

selecting between options, and generating new options. Second, my findings offer the new insight that seeking feedback can be beneficial to reduce response uncertainty not only about the design of the offering, but also about other issues. For example, entrepreneurs can seek feedback to reduce uncertainty about the market and monetisation of their offerings, legal structures of their ventures, and about personal decisions, such as focusing on the new venture full time.

Building on research in strategic management, my findings enrich our understanding about whom entrepreneurs ask for feedback in the early stages of their venture emergence journeys. Research in strategic management suggests that CEOs deal with uncertainty through seeking feedback from within the venture. When deciding whether to launch a new product or what new product to launch, previous research suggests that successful CEOs make fast strategic decisions through a process of generating and considering multiple alternatives with the counsel of all top management members and then focusing on getting advice from the firm's most experienced executive (Eisenhardt, 1989). While my findings showcase a similar approach of reducing response uncertainty through involving others, it also highlights the previously ignored realities of reducing uncertainty in the early stages of the venture emergence process when nascent entrepreneurs often do not have top management teams or in-house counsellors with vast executive experience. In such cases my findings suggest that nascent entrepreneurs can turn to individuals outside of the venture, such as professionals, experts, and other entrepreneurs, to generate multiple alternatives and select between them.

Second, my findings highlight the overlooked functions of feedback seeking. While reducing response uncertainty is probably the most obvious function of feedback seeking (e.g. Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008; Corner & Wu, 2012), my findings suggest that feedback seeking has four discrete roles: reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building a personal and venture reputation. Not only can feedback seeking play

four distinct roles, but entrepreneurs can also seek feedback about more than just their products and services, which has been emphasised so far (e.g. Fisher, 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012). My findings offer new insights into the topics of feedback by indicating that entrepreneurs seek feedback about three broad areas: strategic decisions related to the business model of the venture; management and operations, which focuses on the implementation of strategic decisions; and themselves as individuals and entrepreneurs, including skills, approaches to leading and managing the venture, health, and wellbeing. Such differentiation of feedback topics and roles suggests that entrepreneurs value feedback seeking not only when they design new products and services, but throughout the entire entrepreneurship process.

Entrepreneurs seek feedback to reduce response uncertainty, learn, improve offerings and their positioning, and build reputation. However, they are also motivated to refrain from seeking feedback, which I address in the next findings chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: NOT TO ASK? PROTECTION GOALS AS DRIVERS OF REFRAINING FROM SEEKING FEEDBACK.

5.1. Introduction

This second findings chapter continues the presentation of the emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence (see Figure 3.2) and contributes to answering the first research question: *Why do entrepreneurs* (seek and) *refrain from seeking feedback*? This findings chapter presents the four protection goals that emerged from the analysis as drivers for entrepreneurs to proactively refrain from seeking feedback: to manage resources, to maintain competitiveness, to manage relationships, and to maintain reputation. In this chapter I describe how each protection goal motivated the entrepreneurs to refrain from seeking feedback from a variety of individuals. Where relevant, I include details about which feedback topics were less likely to be discussed in relation to each protection goal. However, as protection goals were drivers to refrain from feedback seeking, I do not address type of feedback because the entrepreneurs did not discuss it. A detailed comparison of the four protection goals is presented in Table 5.2. Illustrative data to support the emergent model in relation to the four protection goals is presented in empirical tables at the end of each section (see Tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6). I conclude with a summary of the findings presented in this chapter and a brief discussion of the four protection goals to refrain from seeking feedback in relation to existing research.

5.2. Protection goals to refrain from seeking feedback

Protection goals drive refraining from feedback seeking. *Protection goals are a second-order theme that I define as desired end-states of maintained current individual and venture capabilities, resources, and relationships achieved by proactively and deliberately*

refraining from seeking feedback. My analysis revealed four protection goals to refrain from seeking feedback: *managing resources, maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships,* and *maintaining reputation*. The entrepreneurs pursued these goals when they expected negative outcomes and potential risks from the act of seeking feedback. My analysis suggested that pursuing protection goals was a way to protect the entrepreneur and/or the venture. The protection feedback-seeking goals could help the entrepreneurs to address current and emerging needs, prevent potential risks, and maintain what had been achieved so far. The findings present refraining from feedback seeking as a proactive and deliberate act in pursuit of specific goals. The following four sections detail each one of the protection goals in terms of their motivation and the individuals less likely to be asked for feedback for each goal. The similarities and differences between the four protection goals can be seen in Table 5.2. The description of each goal, which is a second-order sub-theme, follows the order of the first-order categories presented in a mini data structure only for the protection goals for ease of reading (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1. DATA STRUCTURE FOR SECOND-ORDER THEME: PROTECTION FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS

First-order categories	Sub-themes	Second-order theme
Seeking feedback competes with other activities for resources	Managing resources	Protection feedback-seeking goals
Lack of access to feedback sources		
Lack of access to meaningful feedback		
Seeking feedback exposes ideas	Maintaining competitiveness	
Seeking feedback slows down progress		
Seeking feedback creates tensions with personally significant others	Managing relationships	
Seeking feedback creates negative experiences for venture-relevant others		
Seeking feedback exposes mistakes and vulnerabilities	Maintaining reputation	
Seeking feedback equips sources to share negative information		

TABLE 5.2. PROTECTION FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS COMPARISON

	Motivation not to seek feedback	Less likely topics of feedback	Less likely sources of feedback
Resource management goal	To conserve personal and venture resources for activities other than feedback seeking	Feedback seeking on any topic can compete for resources with other activities	Managing resources can be a goal for any feedback-seeking interaction. Particularly difficult feedback sources are: Family members, Friends, and Beneficiaries due to perceived lack of honesty Professionals and experts, and Social entrepreneurs due to perceived lack of proximity or lack of appropriate social networks
Competitiveness maintenance goal	To sustain a position for effective performance in the marketplace in terms of gaining customers and beneficiaries	Strategic decisions: offering design to protect ideas Feedback seeking on any topic can slow down progress	Social entrepreneurs, Not-for-profit leaders and employees, and Potential customers to protect ideas Everyone to prevent slow progress
Relationship management goal	To prevent tensions and negative experiences with personally significant or venture-relevant others	Feedback seeking on any topic can have a negative influence on relationships	Family members Friends (Potential) customers (Potential) beneficiaries
Reputation management goal	To sustain a positive public image amongst stakeholders and personally significant others	Feedback seeking on any topic can have a negative influence on reputation	Customers Investors and funders Employees Beneficiaries Family members and friends

5.2.1. Managing resources

Managing resources emerged as the first key goal driving refraining from feedback seeking. I define *managing resources as proactively refraining from seeking feedback to conserve time, energy, and effort for activities other than feedback seeking.* My analysis suggested that feedback seeking was a challenging endeavour, which required time, energy, effort, and deliberation. The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that they did not always seek

feedback when they needed it because *seeking feedback competed with other activities for resources*, and *required resources due to lack of access to feedback sources* and *lack of access to meaningful feedback*. These first-order categories underpinned the goal of managing resources and I describe them in detail next.

My analysis revealed that feedback seeking competed for resources with other activities. Seeking feedback from any source and on any topic was perceived to require resources. This referred to personal resources because seeking feedback took time and energy away from other paid work or personal responsibilities, such as childcare. It also referred to venture resources as seeking feedback directly competed for the entrepreneur's time and effort with other activities, such as branding and payroll. This direct competition for personal and venture resources motivated the entrepreneurs to conserve resources and/or allocate them to other actions related to the venture emergence process. It forced them to prioritise not just between seeking and not seeking feedback, but between seeking feedback and other activities in an effort to address their own as well as the venture's current needs. Brandon's statement directly highlighted this competition between feedback seeking and other activities for resources:

> *I am just too busy and preoccupied with other things to seek feedback. Because I am the managing director, I wear six or seven different hats so my mind is always preoccupied with one thing or another whether it is the wages of the drivers or the brand relaunching coming up next week.*

My analysis revealed that two difficulties in particular made feedback seeking a challenging and resource-demanding endeavour: limited or no access to feedback sources and limited or no access to meaningful feedback. The first challenge posed limitations on whether and how frequently entrepreneurs could seek feedback, while the second challenge posed limitations on the quality of the feedback entrepreneurs could receive. I describe these two challenges in detail next.

5.2.1.1. Lack of access to feedback sources

My analysis revealed that feedback seeking required resources due to lack of access to feedback sources. The entrepreneurs deemed feedback seeking difficult because they had limited or no access to perceived appropriate feedback sources. They considered that their access to feedback sources was constrained by four characteristics related to their ventures or related to themselves: the nature of the venture, the nature of the beneficiaries, the entrepreneurs' social networks, and physical proximity to appropriate feedback sources.

First, my analysis revealed that the nature of the venture limited access to feedback sources for entrepreneurs. Many of the entrepreneurs did not have individuals who closely worked with them on a regular basis, such as co-founders, employees, volunteers or collaborators. They often worked alone and could not easily ask for feedback when needed. They made comparisons with their previous or other jobs and how easy it was to ask for feedback when there was an immediate group of people they worked with closely on a regular basis. They reflected that seeking feedback when part of a team was opportune, while as an entrepreneur it was an effort. In the words of Natalie:

> As a university lecturer we get feedback all the time either from students or peers and I ask for feedback all the time on problem solving and it is immediate there. Those people are around me everyday and I can always ask them. So it is not that I am opposed to feedback or can't take it. I can. It is just that at the moment I am not surrounded by the right people, or any people really, to give me feedback.

Second, my analysis revealed that the nature of the beneficiaries limited access to feedback sources for entrepreneurs. A few entrepreneurs served isolated and hard-to-reach socio-demographic groups. This included groups who were traditionally not very engaged in their communities or public life more generally (e.g. unemployed men over 50) and groups who were stigmatised and traditionally have not had a voice. These groups were perceived not to respond to feedback requests often. This challenge was most

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clearly addressed by Dominic and his attempts to gain feedback from families of prisoners:

> *Some people are quite isolated and they really struggle to come forward so what we say is "You get to have a say and all these other families can benefit from comments." But many don't come forward because they feel stigmatised walking through the door. The hardest part is getting feedback from families about previous experience with imprisonment in the family. That is a challenge. We've had only a little bit from less than 10 people so far from those events […] Prisoners' families are notoriously hard, difficult group to engage and they tend to go public on the topic very rarely because of the stigma.*

Third, my analysis revealed that the social networks of the entrepreneurs limited their access to feedback sources. Entrepreneurs perceived the lack of "appropriate" networks in which to find individuals to ask for feedback as a significant challenge to seeking feedback. For some entrepreneurs, this meant the lack of access to business professionals or other social entrepreneurs. Many of the social entrepreneurs reflected that they did not know other social entrepreneurs or "didn't start with a business network or a professional network at all" (Andrew). As Yvette summarised: "I don't work in those circles." For other entrepreneurs, this lack of "appropriate" networks was created by the unique aspects of the venture which posed limitations on whom the entrepreneurs considered to be a credible feedback source. This was the case of Peter who perceived that his problem gambling consultancy was very niche, which limited whom he could go to for feedback: "You know there isn't [sic] that many people with gambling addictions that I know."

Fourth, my analysis revealed that physical proximity shaped and limited access to feedback sources for entrepreneurs. Physical proximity played an important role in determining from whom to seek feedback and when to refrain from it. When entrepreneurs had close contact with feedback sources, they sought more feedback from those individuals than from more distant feedback sources. For example, the proximity of employees and the day-to-day service delivery made it easier for entrepreneurs to seek feedback from their

teams and beneficiaries than to seek feedback from customers or other more distant groups with whom they had less frequent contact. Brandon's experience was indicative of how physical proximity shaped access to feedback sources by making it easier to seek feedback from some individuals than from others:

> The point is when I wake up... I wake up and think about balancing these things [seeking feedback from different sources] on a daily basis but I get to the office and my staff is there and I have only so much time so I focus on them instead of the clients.

The lack of physical proximity limited access to feedback sources. Entrepreneurs perceived that seeking feedback from feedback sources who were distant and remote was more challenging. It required more time, effort, and energy compared to seeking feedback from feedback sources who were physically closer. This was the case with different types of feedback sources. For example, some entrepreneurs had remote teams and the lack of proximity required them to exert more effort to seek feedback from employees because there were no opportunities for naturally occurring conversations and feedback interactions. Other social entrepreneurs struggled with access to social entrepreneurs as feedback sources. For example, some entrepreneurs lived and worked in less urban environments and experienced difficulties in finding other social entrepreneurs in their areas. They had had very positive feedback interactions from large social entrepreneurship conferences and events in London or other big cities and wanted to attend more of those events. However, that required travelling time which was difficult to allocate. This was a significant challenge for entrepreneurs who had other part- or full-time jobs or personal responsibilities, such as childcare. Referring to a large social entrepreneurship meeting in London, Jennifer from Lincoln reflected:

> I just don't get round to doing it often enough because of my job and working on getting the business off the ground. […] I'd like to do it again, but the meetings are a long way away and there is so much going on so I just can't make it.

5.2.1.2. Lack of access to meaningful feedback

My analysis revealed that feedback seeking required resources due to lack of access to meaningful feedback. The entrepreneurs deemed feedback seeking difficult because they had limited or no access to perceived meaningful feedback. The entrepreneurs considered that their access to meaningful feedback was constrained by three characteristics related to the venture or related to feedback sources: the novelty and complexity of the venture, the perceived lack of honesty in feedback, and the resource constraints on feedback sources. Addressing these challenges required resources, such as time, effort, and energy that could be used for other personal or venture tasks and activities.

First, my analysis revealed that the novelty and complexity of the venture limited access to meaningful feedback for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs faced difficulties because of the uniqueness of the social issue or the general approach they were taking. For instance, when entrepreneurs whose ventures were considered to be novel sought feedback, they received responses such as "Oh, I've never thought about it.", "I don't know.", "I am not sure." (Peter), "Haven't really thought about the effect of imprisonment on families before." (Dominic). Other entrepreneurs faced overall lack of understanding of what their ventures aimed to achieve and their approaches because "it was too far out from everything else that has been done" (Josie B.) or because "someone who works at Deutsche Bank" does not understand the community the entrepreneur aimed to support (Sadie). Such experiences with surprised and unsure feedback sources were perceived to require time, energy, and effort to gain meaningful feedback from them.

Second, my analysis revealed that the perceived lack of honesty limited access to meaningful feedback for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs' discourse suggested that they struggled to receive critical and constructive feedback. They did not perceive sources to maliciously give them dishonest feedback. Instead they perceived that sources, such as family members and friends, were not always

honest with their feedback because they did not want to hurt entrepreneurs' feelings. Honesty of feedback sources was also a challenge with regard to feedback from customers and beneficiaries. Some entrepreneurs deemed that their customers and beneficiaries were focused on being grateful for the venture's support and offerings instead of providing feedback that could be used for improvements. This perceived lack of or difficult access to negative or critical feedback forced the entrepreneurs to spend more time and effort in conversations asking for feedback, explaining why negative or critical feedback would be valuable, and even finding new and different ways to ask for feedback. Angela J., who provided training and support to people with disabilities to become self-employed, experienced this difficulty of accessing honest feedback from her beneficiaries:

> I generally think what's difficult with feedback is if you're working with a client, with a customer, because if you're trying to help people in wanting to be self-employed and you're trying to get feedback on whether the intervention that we've given works, it's trying to find new and innovative ways of asking for that feedback so that you get the more negative or critical back so that it just doesn't seem a rosy account. Do you know what I mean? So usually if it's somebody you're offering on-going support to and you ask them for feedback on how it's going and what could be better, usually the easiest option is for people to say "Oh yeah, it's good. It's fine. I'm doing alright." Do you know what I mean, and sometimes you actually want to draw out some of that where it could be better because you want [to] show improvement, but sometimes people just don't want to be negative.

Third, my analysis revealed that resource constraints on feedback sources limited access to meaningful feedback for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs recognised that for someone to give feedback, either in person or through technology-mediated communication, they had to make a personal investment of resources. Feedback sources had to engage with the entrepreneur's feedback request, potentially spend time thinking, reflecting, and preparing the feedback, and finally delivering the feedback. Even when individuals were willing to provide feedback, they could not always do so within the desired timeline with the expected level of

detail. For example, Lauren reflected when asked about the challenges of seeking feedback:

> *Probably the fact that people are very, very busy and they sometimes say "Yes, we'll get back to you on that." and they never do. I can understand it, but it is difficult for us since we aim to integrate and embed the pupils in the community. People's busy lifestyle is what sometimes prevents them from giving those few minutes to respond to your question or request.*

In summary, the entrepreneurs described feedback seeking as a challenging and resource-demanding endeavour. The characteristics of the venture and its beneficiaries, the entrepreneur's social networks, proximity, and the feedback sources' demands posed constraints on access to feedback sources and access to meaningful feedback. To address these challenges, the entrepreneurs invested additional time and effort to identify appropriate sources, plan and prioritise feedback requests, request feedback in certain ways, elaborately explain their work, and even warn and prepare others before asking them for feedback. My analysis suggested that feedback seeking was often an elaborately planned initiative with multiple decisions and priorities. For example, Yvette's experience with teachers highlights this deliberate and careful approach to seeking feedback:

> *I have to be very, very careful how much time I ask for from teachers because they are already on overload and a lot of them have only been back for 4, 5, 6 days and they are already exhausted. So I am very, very economical about that. Very careful how much I ask for.*

5.2.1.3. Less likely feedback topics

My analysis revealed that feedback topics did not influence the resource-management goal. Overall, the entrepreneurs considered how the act of seeking feedback required resources, such as time, energy, and effort. These resource demands were perceived to be relevant for seeking feedback on any topic.

TABLE 5.3. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: MANAGING RESOURCES

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback competes with other activities for resources	"It is 45 minutes less that I could be working on my [software] development" – Tim "that is still time I can use somewhere else" – Brandon "It is still a slow process for me because I am still employed and I have children to look after." – Natalie
Lack of access to feedback sources	"I think getting feedback on a regular basis is good but it is just me at the moment in my living room. I don't have a group of people that I can go to like I used to. You can just do it over a coffee or at the end of a meeting you can easily seek feedback. It is opportune. But it is an effort I suppose at the moment to seek people out." – Eva "I am not really in contact on LinkedIn or Twitter with any social entrepreneurs, individuals like myself, which I need to do. I am also hoping to go to another UnLtd event over the summer when I have more time." – Natalie
Lack of access to meaningful feedback	"because it is difficult to give honest feedback, and you know people often want to please people. People are generally quite nice and don't like upsetting people." – Eva "You've got family and stuff, but they are always going to be emotionally attached to you. Sometimes you just need something that is a bit more neutral and less biased. More specialised." – Peter "I tend not to go to friends. A lot of my friends are retired. They think I am mad that I am starting this at 65 and what am I doing? I have some colleagues from the School of Social Entrepreneurs. They are all on what I call normal projects, so community things, often working with children, but children who have been excluded or at the extreme ends. So they've always seen me as doing something very different. So I don't ask them either because they don't get it." – Yvette

5.2.1.4. Less likely feedback sources

My analysis revealed that managing personal and venture resources influenced the overall desirability of feedback seeking. The lack of or limited access to feedback sources and meaningful feedback posed constraints on entrepreneurs' resources and how much time, effort, and energy they could invest in seeking feedback regardless of the source. This protection feedback-seeking goal was activated by the act of seeking feedback in general, not in relation to specific feedback sources. However, my analysis suggested more meaningful patterns on a fine-grained level. First, entrepreneurs considered professionals, experts, and other social entrepreneurs to be less accessible due to lack of proximity or appropriate social

networks. Second, entrepreneurs considered family members, friends, and beneficiaries to be less honest and critical in their feedback, thus they were less likely to be asked for feedback in relation to managing resources.

Not only did feedback seeking compete for resources with other activities, but it could also hinder the competitiveness of the venture. I turn to this issue next.

5.2.2. Maintaining competitiveness

Maintaining competitiveness emerged as the second goal not to seek feedback. I define *maintaining competitiveness as proactively refraining from seeking feedback to sustain a position for effective performance in the marketplace in terms of gaining customers and beneficiaries quickly.* Feedback seeking hindered competitiveness through two different pathways: *exposing ideas* and *slowing down progress*, which could create opportunities for other organisations to gain customers and beneficiaries quicker than the venture. These two pathways were the first-order categories underpinning the goal to maintain competitiveness and I describe them in detail next.

5.2.2.1. Exposing ideas

My analysis revealed that the first pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness was exposing ideas to competitors and potential customers.

First, feedback seeking could expose ideas, approaches, and methods to competing organisations. To receive feedback, entrepreneurs had to disclose relevant information based on which the sources could provide feedback. This could be information about ideas for new products and services, new methods and approaches of programme design, or features of products. Exposing ideas to seek feedback was perceived to hinder the competitiveness of the venture when the information shared by the entrepreneur was implemented by a different for-profit or not-for-profit organisation that had more resources or could enter the market quicker. Thus, instead

of enhancing the competitiveness of the venture in the future by learning and improving, feedback seeking could actually strengthen the competition and limit the venture's opportunities to gain customers and beneficiaries. This was a fear entrepreneurs experienced when they sought feedback from other social entrepreneurs or not-for-profit leaders and employees which aimed to address the same or similar social issue. For example, Matthew's experience highlighted this goal:

> I think competition actually would be the only thing. There are a couple of them... The woman that I set up the last social enterprise I worked for, the one before, she is a friend and an ex-colleague, but me and her have spoken about it but we are quite cagey with each other because I wouldn't want to tell her about some of the work I am doing because I am concerned she might take some of the ideas and I know she is the same. We are now in competition whereas before we'd talk much more freely about our plans and what we were doing.

Second, feedback seeking could expose ideas, approaches, and methods to potential customers. A few entrepreneurs recognised that sharing too much information about their offerings with a potential customer to receive feedback could be dangerous. Seeking feedback from potential customers could equip the feedback source to build the internal capacity to design and deliver the product or service instead of buying it from the venture. In such situations entrepreneurs could not only lose a potential customer, but even help them to become a competitor. Samantha's experience highlighted this goal. She met with two members of the local tobacco control commission as a potential customer for her animations. She shared parts of the product while it was still in development and the theory behind it in order to understand how to improve the product and make it more appealing to the commissioners. However, she started to experience doubts and concerns about the potential negative impact on her venture:

> But they can go and take the idea now. This is the danger. They can say "We are not using your animations now, but we will use the approach for our programme." So it is very difficult when you start talking to people and you haven't actually launched it yet. And that is the danger, the difficulty, when you are relying on the good nature of people.

The goal to maintain competitiveness through protecting ideas was activated by personal fears, assumptions, and experiences. Some entrepreneurs, like Samantha and Matthew, took a "cagey" (Matthew) approach to feedback seeking because they experienced doubts, fears, and lack of trust in different feedback sources. For other entrepreneurs, the goal to protect their ideas was activated by experiences. Some entrepreneurs, like Andrew and Tim, had witnessed not-for-profit organisations and social ventures stealing ideas from others. Josie B.'s discourse revealed that her idea for a programme that supported youth ex-offenders was appropriated by a not-for-profit organisation after she reached out to them for feedback. These experiences made entrepreneurs more cautious with feedback seeking and motivated them to protect their ideas.

5.2.2.2. Slowing down progress

My analysis revealed that the second pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness was slowing down progress.

First, the entrepreneurs' discourse suggested that feedback seeking was a lengthy and resource-demanding endeavour. As already discussed in the previous section, feedback seeking was perceived to require resources, such as time, energy, and effort, and competed with other venture emergence activities and personal commitments for these resources. Additionally, feedback seeking was perceived to be a challenging and often lengthy process of engaging with individuals, reflecting on their feedback, making changes, and seeking more feedback. For example, Clinton spent several months engaging his community and seeking feedback from them before he took tangible action to develop a community garden. Other entrepreneurs considered that they spent too much time seeking feedback instead of actually launching their ventures. They had started a cycle of "just one more person" which constantly

pushed them to delay the start of their trading activities in favour of seeking additional feedback. In the words of Samantha:

> *I am almost ready and then "I'll just ask." and again I am almost ready and "I'll just ask." I should just go. Just jump off the cliff.*

Second, the entrepreneurs' discourse suggested that feedback seeking slowed down decision making and action. Entrepreneurs considered how feedback seeking could increase uncertainty and create feelings of doubt, confusion, and lack of enthusiasm. They deemed that there was such a thing as "too much feedback" which confused them and made it more difficult to make decisions. This was common when they sought feedback from diverse groups of individuals who gave them contradictory or negative feedback. Thus feedback seeking was perceived to increase uncertainty and for this reason entrepreneurs were motivated to refrain from it. As feedback seeking increased feelings of doubt, confusion, and lack of enthusiasm, it could delay the entrepreneurs' actions and provide opportunities for similar ventures or not-for-profit organisations to gain more customers and beneficiaries, to strengthen their brands, and launch new products and services, ultimately making the venture less competitive in the marketplace. For instance, Lisa's comment demonstrated why she was sometimes motivated not to seek feedback for this reason:

> *You sometimes don't know who to listen to or who to go to and sometimes you don't want to go to anyone because you are so overwhelmed by all of the different places from which it is coming from.*

Tim did not always seek feedback to maintain his enthusiasm to continue working on his venture:

> *I am willing to listen to people, but what I find is that majority of people want to play devil's advocate and tell you why it won't work instead of being positive and supportive. So I generally avoid going into such conversations with people and asking them for feedback because as I say they don't share my enthusiasm and it knocks me back and I don't need that. I need people to be supportive and say "Yeah, great. Carry on." instead of making me doubt the project and myself*

5.2.2.3. Less likely feedback topics

My analysis revealed that feedback topics partially influenced the goal to maintain competitiveness. Feedback topics influenced the first pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness: exposure of ideas. In order to protect their ideas from the competition and potential customers, the entrepreneurs refrained from seeking feedback on strategic decisions related to the design of the offering, such as approaches, methods, and features. However, feedback topics did not influence the second pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness: slowing down progress, because any topic could have such an effect. As already discussed, feedback seeking on any topic was a resource-demanding and possibly lengthy process that could slow down progress. Additionally, feedback seeking on any topic could influence feelings of doubt, confusion, and lack of enthusiasm.

5.2.2.4. Less likely feedback sources

My analysis revealed that feedback sources influenced the goal to maintain competitiveness partially. Feedback sources influenced the first pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness: exposure of ideas. In order to protect their ideas from the competition and potential customers, the entrepreneurs refrained from seeking feedback from other social entrepreneurs, not-for-profit leaders and employees, and powerful potential customers, as all these feedback sources could appropriate the entrepreneurs' ideas related to the design of their offerings. However, feedback sources did not influence the second pathway by which feedback seeking could hinder competitiveness: slowing down progress, because any source could have such an effect. Seeking feedback from anyone required resources and could influence feelings of doubt, confusion, and lack of enthusiasm.

Another protection feedback-seeking goal that emerged from my analysis was managing relationships with personally significant and venture-relevant others.

TABLE 5.4. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: MAINTAINING COMPETITIVENESS

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback exposes ideas	"So people were stealing our ideas before we had the financial resources to deliver them, which is heartbreaking." – Josie B. "If I am concerned with them taking or stealing my idea, I wouldn't be engaged with them to begin with." – Andrew "Initially, in day one, I was worried that someone might steal the idea because it is such a good idea." – Daniel S.
Seeking feedback slows down progress	"That in some way creates a bit of pressure for us because it maybe delays the process of what we are doing a little bit." – Clinton "That is not a good thing. That is my failing actually. I think it is good to have feedback but you can have too much. I am really ready to go on, get it finished and go. If I were just a normal business, a business in the traditional sense, I'd have gone by now." – Samantha "I've had lots of bits of little understanding chipped in and I'm not sure. Although I feel like overall it's increased my understanding, it may have just caused utter confusion and misinformed me, to be honest" – Daniel H.

5.2.3. Managing relationships

The third protection feedback-seeking goal that emerged from the analysis was managing relationships. I define *managing relationships as proactively refraining from seeking feedback to prevent tensions and negative experiences with personally significant or venture-relevant others.* The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that *seeking feedback created tensions with personally significant others* and it *created negative experiences for stakeholders*. These two experiences were the first-order categories underpinning the goal of managing relationships to cope with emerging needs and potential risks to protect both the entrepreneur and the venture. Entrepreneurs actively refrained from seeking feedback to protect the current state of personal and venture-relevant relationships, instead of damaging them with feedback seeking. First, my analysis suggested that refraining from feedback seeking to manage relationships with personally significant others was a way to protect the entrepreneurs as individuals. Seeking feedback from family members and friends could create an uncomfortable personal context for entrepreneurs. In extreme situations this context could even be unsupportive and hostile. As individuals with personal lives, the entrepreneurs aimed to

maintain comfortable personal contexts, manage personal stress, and protect themselves as individuals with families and friends, not just entrepreneurs. Second, my analysis suggested that refraining from feedback seeking to manage relationships with venture-relevant others was a way to protect the venture. Creating an operational venture with reliable trading activities required positive relationships with (potential) customers and beneficiaries. However, seeking feedback from these individuals could create negative experiences for them. I describe these two first-order categories in detail next.

5.2.3.1. Seeking feedback creates tensions with personally significant others

Entrepreneurs were motivated to refrain from feedback seeking to manage relationships with personally significant others, such as family members and friends, because seeking feedback from them created tensions with these individuals and affected the entrepreneurs personally. Seeking feedback from family members and friends could become annoying for them and even turn into "white noise" of the entrepreneur constantly discussing his/her venture. Seeking feedback was also perceived to highlight the lack of work-life balance for some entrepreneurs. For example, Alister's family considered him a workaholic and could not understand why he "can't retire from school as a normal person would." Not only did seeking feedback highlight entrepreneurs' strong focus on their ventures, but it was also perceived to have a negative impact on their communication with significant others beyond conversations about the venture. For example, Roger highlighted how seeking feedback from his partner was difficult and he became defensive when she criticised his work:

> I try with my partner. Her background is marketing, so she's got a lot of relevant skills, but we don't kind of communicate too well when it comes to talking about work. I try not to use her as a sounding board. I think we're better off keeping work out of our relationship. So that's something I do struggle with. If I'm really struggling with something I might ask her, but I'd prefer to go to somebody else. […] Like I showed her my website and just without meaning to there were certain things that she didn't

like about it and then I got defensive about it. So I kind of think it's better for me not to engage in that because then that does have an impact on our relationship to an extent.

In other cases, entrepreneurs were motivated to refrain from seeking feedback because of the lack of support from their families. For instance, when the entrepreneur's activities were not progressing well and they needed feedback to improve their performance, they were afraid that seeking feedback would worry their family members and highlight the lack of income from the venture (e.g. Olivia). In more extreme cases, the entrepreneurs' feedback sources actively encouraged them not to continue their work on the venture and get a "real job", as was Rose's case:

I realised my husband is the only one I wouldn't seek feedback from. And although, I do sometimes mention the project, majority of the time it is met with hostility because I am not bringing in any income. So it is very... It is a bit stressful really. The requirement for me is really to get out and go get a real job and trying to make this work is quite hard because it is not very well respected in my family. […] He is the one who is bringing the income so it is understandable and he is absolutely right but it is just difficult for me because therefore I can't talk to him about it at all. He regards it as a waste of his brainpower given that it is not bringing in any money and you know I have to think about my relationship with him and my family not just the project.

5.2.3.2. Seeking feedback creates negative experiences for venture-relevant others

Entrepreneurs were motivated to refrain from feedback seeking to manage relationships with stakeholders because seeking feedback from them created negative experiences for these individuals, thus potentially affecting the venture. The most prominent stakeholders considered were (potential) customers and beneficiaries. Similar to seeking feedback from family members and friends, entrepreneurs considered how (potential) customers and beneficiaries could perceive feedback request as annoying, frustrating, and even threatening. Frequent feedback requests to stakeholders could be perceived as "pestering" and damage the relationship between the venture and the (potential) customers or

beneficiaries. Entrepreneurs were afraid that such negative experiences for (potential) customers and beneficiaries could have a negative impact on their relationships and even influence trading activities. As Selena summarised:

> I get worried that I am like pestering the teachers. I kind of don't want to email them too much even when they haven't delivered because they are still my target market and I don't want them to feel like they are being hounded. I have to be a bit careful that way.

This need to protect the relationships with (potential) customers and beneficiaries and create positive experiences for them was even more evident for ventures whose work engaged with vulnerable socio-demographic groups or was very different from the status quo. In such cases, the entrepreneurs considered how seeking feedback from vulnerable customers or beneficiaries could upset them and create additional stress for them. The entrepreneurs, who considered their work to be very different from the status quo, walked a fine line between developing an innovative solution that could disrupt the current system and carefully involving those who work in the current system as they would be the main beneficiaries. For example, Yvette was aiming to create a venture that would change the education system to empower students' creativity, research, and problem-solving skills. She recognised that seeking feedback from teachers would not necessarily help her because:

> I don't want them to feel threatened, I want them to feel like I am on their side […] When you are in a culture that is doing exactly the opposite of what you are trying to do, it is really difficult to ask for feedback.

5.2.3.3. Less likely feedback topics

My analysis revealed that feedback topics did not influence the goal to manage relationships. The entrepreneurs who were concerned with managing relationships considered how the act of seeking feedback could create tensions and negative experiences with personally significant or venture-relevant others. Feedback seeking on any topic could create such tensions and negative experiences.

TABLE 5.5. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback creates tensions with personally significant others	"So for within the family for instance, I am very careful how much I talk to them about it because otherwise you are just going on and on and on and on. You have to be careful that it doesn't become white noise for them because you are not going to get their support in a positive way, which is natural." – Samantha "You know, my husband would get fed up of me talking about it, so I don't tend to talk about it at home […] You know, he works full-time in a college and we also run the [Name of venture] which is the serviced apartment and he's in a band as well, so when we do sit down in the evening we probably … I mean he's away abroad working at the moment, but when we're together it's usually just a few hours in the evening and I think if I started talking to him about my plans for the business in the next year he would just switch off, do you know what I mean? He doesn't want to talk about that really. He's not particularly interested I guess is the answer. He's not even sure what I do just because we both run really busy lives. So I guess when we do meet we tend to go out for dinner or we tend to just have our time." – Angela J.
Seeking feedback creates negative experiences for venture-relevant others	*"The other staff I was telling you about... The one who is very sensitive. I didn't ask her because I knew she would start crying and that prevented me from asking her for feedback sooner rather than later. But it came to a crunch this morning and I had to ask her for feedback and it deteriorated into a very emotional meeting and I was trying to avoid that because it is difficult for me and for her and I didn't want to upset her. […] Usually I just ask for it. If you were working for me and you were a fully abled person or it was a commercial venture then I'd be asking you constantly whether about getting more sales or marketing the company better. I'd be doing the whole thing. But if you come from a mental disability background like my staff you've got to be careful what you say and how you say it so you don't upset the person."* – Brandon "But for Scotland that is quite the culture shock because there are heavy drinking patters here. Mostly we have very positive feedback, but occasionally we have one-off negative reactions and that might be because of the culture. But also because that places the blame on them for drinking during pregnant [sic] and not knowing the risk. So it becomes very personal. So the child goes into school and have learning and behavioural issues and is seen as immature and that is because the mother was drinking during pregnancy." – Elinor

5.2.3.4. Less likely feedback sources

My analysis revealed that the goal to manage relationships was associated with four groups of feedback sources. First, entrepreneurs were concerned with seeking feedback from family members and friends to protect themselves as individuals with personal lives. Second, entrepreneurs were concerned with seeking feedback from (potential) customers and beneficiaries to protect the venture and its trading activities. Thus, when entrepreneurs pursued the relationship

management goal, they were less likely to seek feedback from family members, friends, and (potential) customers and beneficiaries.

Linked with entrepreneurs' relationships with customers and beneficiaries was the motivation to maintain a positive public image.

5.2.4. Maintaining reputation

The last protection feedback-seeking goal that emerged from the analysis was maintaining reputation. I define *maintaining reputation as proactively refraining from* feedback seeking *to sustain a positive public image amongst key stakeholders,* such as customers, beneficiaries, employees, volunteers, funders, and investors. The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that *seeking feedback exposed mistakes and vulnerabilities to sources* and *it equipped sources to share negative information*. These two experiences were the first-order categories underpinning the goal of maintaining the entrepreneur's and/or the venture's current reputation. Entrepreneurs pursued the reputation management goal when they were concerned with how the act of seeking feedback could be perceived as a sign of vulnerability, insecurity, and lack of knowledge by feedback sources or when they were concerned with feedback sources being in a position to change the public image of the venture. Entrepreneurs perceived these experiences as damaging their current reputation and hindering venture emergence progress. To protect themselves and their ventures, entrepreneurs were motivated to refrain from seeking feedback. I describe these experiences next.

5.2.4.1. Seeking feedback exposes mistakes and vulnerabilities

The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that seeking feedback could expose their mistakes and vulnerabilities. They considered that seeking feedback when they faced issues, challenges, or mistakes drew attention to their lack of skills, knowledge, and capabilities to launch and manage a new venture. This was perceived to have an impact on how others saw the entrepreneur and potentially hurt his/ her public image and the opportunities to work with these individuals,

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recruit them as customers, and even manage teams effectively. For example, Lisa was concerned that her employees would think she was not a good manager:

> *I am sometimes reluctant to ask for feedback about ways that I can lead and manage people because I am afraid that people will think I am not good at my job.*

Daniel H. experienced a similar need to protect his current image of a knowledgeable and decisive entrepreneur in front of investors whom he aimed to approach in the near future:

> *it worries me that if I go to someone and say "I don't know what the hell I'm doing, but in two weeks time I want to come back to you and ask you for £100,000."*

My analysis revealed that the reputation of the entrepreneur was considered relevant for the reputation of the venture. While the motivation to maintain a positive public image referred to stakeholders perceiving entrepreneurs in a positive light, or at least not in a negative light, it was also deemed to have an impact on the venture, especially in the early stages of the venture emergence process. Many of the entrepreneurs considered that they were the venture and the venture was them, especially when they were working alone. They perceived that their image of insecure, vulnerable, and incompetent individuals would reflect poorly on their ventures' reputations. Daniel H. reflected on this close link between the image of his venture and his personal image:

> *there's a very close link between my reputation and the reputation of the business because I am the business to an extent. There is a team around me, yes, but many people, certainly our partners and kind of customers in the third and public sector, they see me as Local Works and Local Works as me, so there's not a lot of difference between them.*

My analysis revealed that the reputation of the entrepreneur was considered as relevant for their personal lives as well. The goal to maintain a positive image also extended to family members and friends as they could prime the entrepreneurs to maintain their reputation as well as to reduce the image risks of feedback seeking. On the one hand, a few entrepreneurs were concerned with how their

significant others perceived them. Entrepreneurs expressed the need to be seen as competent and aimed to maintain a positive image in front of their family members and friends in the same way as they were concerned with how key venture stakeholders, such as investors, customers or employees, perceived them. They wanted to demonstrate to their significant others that their support of and belief in the entrepreneur was not in vain. Roger's experience reflected this reputation management goal in relation to his partner:

> *I think from a personal perspective it is difficult to ask for feedback from my partner just because I feel there's a lot of pressure on me. I left my job. She's been the one financially supporting me for a little while and there's extra pressure for me to make this work to prove to her that her belief in me was well-founded and I can do this. So it is difficult to expose your vulnerabilities in your personal life. I try not to do that.*

On the other hand, entrepreneurs were less concerned with reputation management when they had very strong and trusting relationships with family members or friends. When they had relationships with individuals who had been with them in other situations that exposed vulnerabilities, insecurities, and mistakes, entrepreneurs were more open to seek feedback from these individuals instead of others. Pradip's experience of alcohol recovery and the support he received throughout his journey demonstrated how such relationships and previous experiences played an important role in maintaining reputation when seeking feedback:

> *So because I'm in recovery and because I got help through… I essentially got help through groups 7 or 8 years ago, but I've met lots of people in the last 8 years who are also on a similar journey and by the very nature of the journey you become quite close, and you talk to each other quite open, and become quite open with each other, and over time you develop friendships, and usually the nature of the friendships becomes that you can pretty much talk about anything. Whereas most people are actually scared to talk about what's really going on for fear of looking stupid or not having everything under control, but actually the reality is I can talk to them about all of this because I trust them […] I wouldn't necessarily have these conversations with people who I don't know because I generally talk to people I've met in recovery.*

5.2.4.2. Seeking feedback equips others to share negative information

Entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that seeking feedback could equip feedback sources to share negative information about the venture, thus shaping its public image. A few entrepreneurs expressed concerns about how seeking feedback in the early stages could create an image of an incomplete or poorly designed product or service. This concern was common among entrepreneurs who were still designing their products and services and working to improve them. However, they recognised that not everyone would understand that there was more work to be done to polish the offering, that some people would not be able to imagine what the final offering would look like, or they would not accept they were not the target audience for this product or service. Thus, entrepreneurs considered the option that these feedback sources could afterward spread negative information about the product or service and influence potential customers or beneficiaries. Samantha's experience with the local tobacco control commission as both a potential customer and an organisation that worked with and influenced her potential customers highlighted this concern of how seeking feedback from the commissioners might lead to negative outcomes for the venture:

> There's a lot to lose depending on what opinion was right, but then there was a lot to gain. The worst that could happen is that they said "This is absolutely rubbish. We are going to say 'Don't do it. That's it. As Tobacco Control, we are saying this is a no-go.'" […] If, for instance, I show the animations to Lydia and she says "I really don't like these." What will that do to STOP!? We've got a prominent person in a position of power who is then going to say "They are rubbish." One person's opinion. That's not good.

5.2.4.3. Less likely feedback topics

My analysis revealed that feedback topics did not influence the goal to maintain reputation. The entrepreneurs who were concerned with maintaining reputation considered how the act of seeking feedback itself could influence the source's opinion of the

TABLE 5.6. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF SUB-THEME: MAINTAINING REPUTATION

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Seeking feedback exposes mistakes and vulnerabilities	"if I know I've screwed up and it's one of our customers and I can probably get away with them not finding out I've screwed up, but if I had some information from them it'd help me unscrew up but if I asked them they'd know that I'd screwed up"– Daniel H. "And what I feared was that people would judge me or you know just being sensitive." – Sadie
Seeking feedback equips sources to share negative information	"So you even question the decision to ask the question in the first place. And also the big issue there is that the conference was aimed at employers, HR people within large organisations, so there is a cost involved, partly because we need to cover the cost of the conference, but also to make some surplus as well. And so some of the disabled people in this group that we asked feedback from said 'You are excluding us because you are charging too much money.' But you are not the target audience. You already know about the business case for hiring people with disabilities. You don't need to be at the conference. You already know that. And all the speakers at the conference are disabled instead of the usual non-disabled people telling other non-disabled people what disabled people need, which is what we have a history of. This is a conference where all of the speakers are disabled talking to employers and their disabled employees so it is authentic. But the audience is people who need to learn about these things and that is not disabled people, that is employers. We have, unfortunately, ended up, by asking for feedback upsetting a lot of people because they see us as a disabled organisation that is there to help disabled people and they think we have actually discriminated against disabled people because we are charging too much for the conference. Now I wish I hadn't bothered with seeking feedback really and just gone ahead and done it." – Josie H.

entrepreneur and the venture, regardless of what the feedback request was about. My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs were concerned with maintaining their public image when they sought feedback about strategic decisions, such as investment; management and operations, such as marketing; and personal style, such as leadership skills. Therefore, feedback seeking on any topic could damage the public image of the entrepreneur and the venture because of the act itself.

5.2.4.4. Less likely feedback sources

My analysis revealed that the goal to maintain reputation was associated with five groups of feedback sources. First, entrepreneurs were concerned with how seeking feedback from customers and investors or funders would be perceived by these feedback sources. Second, entrepreneurs were also concerned with how seeking feedback from employees and beneficiaries could have a negative impact on their public image. Finally, entrepreneurs were also

concerned with maintaining their image in front of family members and friends. Thus, when entrepreneurs pursued the reputation maintenance goal, they were less likely to seek feedback from customers, investors or funders, employees, beneficiaries, family members, and friends.

5.3. Chapter summary and discussion

In this second findings chapter I focused on addressing a part of the first research question that guided this thesis: *Why do entrepreneurs* (seek and) *refrain from seeking feedback?* In addressing this research question I identified four protection goals that drove entrepreneurs to proactively and deliberately refrain from seeking feedback. My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs proactively and deliberately refrained from seeking feedback to manage resources, maintain competitiveness, manage relationships, and maintain reputation. These protection goals represented desired end-states of maintained current individual and venture capabilities, resources, and relationships that the entrepreneurs could achieve by refraining from seeking feedback. These four protection goals demonstrate that refraining from feedback seeking is not a passive avoidance of feedback seeking or a lack of a response, but an active, deliberate, and purposeful act in pursuit of goals that are different from the goals that motivate entrepreneurs to seek feedback. Such active avoidance of the feedback-seeking behaviour is also conceptually different from the active of passive avoidance of feedback as a specific type of information that can be provided passively by the market or through unsolicited advice whereby the entrepreneur has little control over the initiation of the feedback interaction (Seidel, Packalen & O'Mahony, 2016).

Conceptualising refraining from seeking feedback as an active, deliberate and purposeful act in pursuit of specific goals highlights two important characteristics of feedback seeking. First, both seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback are purposeful and intentional actions in pursuit of different personal or venture goals.

Second, seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback represent conflicting actions, however, they are not exact motivational opposites. Instead, they represent different routes to achieve different goals. For example, if entrepreneurs seek feedback to learn or to improve offerings, proactively refraining from feedback seeking is not performed in effort to deteriorate existing knowledge or to worsen the current offering, which would represent exact motivational opposites. Instead, entrepreneurs may refrain from seeking feedback to manage relationships, which is an entirely separate and different goal. This is in line with emerging evidence in psychology (Richetin et al., 2011) and neuroscience (Brass & Haggard, 2007) which demonstrates that cognitions about not performing a behaviour are not simple opposites of cognitions about performing the same behaviour. Instead, opposite behaviours may be the result of separate goals, different self-regulation strategies (Richetin et al., 2011), and activation of different areas of the brain (Brass & Haggard, 2007). An example of such opposite behaviours that rely on different goals are breastfeeding and not breastfeeding. New mothers breastfeed because they are motivated to enhance the health of the infant or to create a stronger emotional bond, while they can also be motivated not to breastfeed to return to work earlier or to maintain the father's positive attitudes toward the mother's body (Richetin et al., 2011).

Overall, my analysis indicated that proactively refraining from seeking feedback to manage resources, maintain competitiveness, manage relationships, and maintain reputation sustained current capabilities (e.g. novel ideas), resources (e.g. reputation), and relationships (e.g. with significant others) that protected both the entrepreneur and/or the venture. My findings provide a more nuanced and detailed understanding of feedback seeking that highlights the possible negative outcomes for entrepreneurs and their ventures. In particular, these findings enrich our conceptualisation of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and related theories (i.e. effectuation and action regulation) in two significant ways in relation

to negative outcomes and the importance of the act of feedback seeking beyond the content. I address these two aspects next.

First, my findings challenge the assumption that feedback seeking is beneficial for entrepreneurs and their ventures, which complicates theories of entrepreneurial action, such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008) and action regulation (Frese, 2007; 2009). Both theories assume that feedback seeking is generally beneficial and therefore more feedback seeking is better. However, my findings offer the novel insight that feedback seeking can have negative impact that affects entrepreneurs as individuals and professionals, as well as their ventures. As both effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001; 2008) and action regulation (Frese 2007; 2009) attempt to explain how entrepreneurial action can lead to new venture creation and improved entrepreneurial performance, adopting a more nuanced view of feedback seeking with its potentially positive and negative outcomes can enhance the usefulness of these theories for research and practice.

At the individual level, my findings enrich our understanding of feedback seeking's potential negative outcomes for entrepreneurs. My findings demonstrate that feedback seeking can have negative outcomes for entrepreneurs, which have been ignored so far. Past theoretical research portrays feedback seeking as having only positive outcomes for entrepreneurs as it provides them with information to correct errors and improve their actions (Frese, 2007; 2009). However, my findings suggest that feedback seeking can affect entrepreneurs' personal lives. They depict entrepreneurs as individuals with personal lives who have responsibilities outside the venture and are embedded in their families and friendship groups. Seeking feedback can interfere with entrepreneurs' personal lives as it takes away resources, such as time, energy, and effort, that they can use to address personal responsibilities, such as childcare or financial security for the family. Additionally, seeking feedback from family members and friends can have a negative impact on these interpersonal relationships. Feedback seeking can also affect entrepreneurs' professional role in relation to their reputation.

Feedback seeking can damage entrepreneurs' reputation as it can portray them as insecure, vulnerable, and lacking knowledge. The act of seeking feedback can highlight mistakes and undermine feedback sources' confidence in the entrepreneur. Yet the perceptions that stakeholders, such as investors or customers, have of an entrepreneur are important as they can influence their decisions about investing in the venture or purchasing its offerings.

At the venture level, my findings enrich our understanding of feedback seeking's potential negative outcomes for ventures. Previous research highlights the positive outcomes of seeking feedback for coping with the uncertainty of starting new ventures (Sarasvathy 2001; 2008), innovation (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015), gaining first customers, developing dynamic capabilities (Corner & Wu, 2012), and making fast strategic decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Ultimately, feedback seeking is suggested to relate to venture performance (Katre & Salipante, 2012). However, my findings demonstrate that feedback seeking can also affect ventures in negative ways by damaging their competitiveness; damaging relationships with key stakeholders; or damaging the reputation of the venture as an entity led by an individual who is vulnerable, insecure, lacking in knowledge, and making mistakes. Ultimately, these negative influences of feedback seeking on the venture can have an impact on its overall performance by strengthening the competition and not attracting customers or investors.

Second, my findings enrich our understanding of the pathways by which feedback seeking can influence the venture emergence process. My findings build on previous research, which suggests that the benefits of feedback seeking are generated by the content of the feedback received, by proposing that the mere act of feedback seeking can also have an instrumental role in influencing the venture emergence process. Previous research highlights that entrepreneurs seek feedback because they value feedback as a type of information that serves a diagnostic purpose. They seek feedback to receive feedback and the content of the message is what helps

entrepreneurs to improve actions (Frese, 2007; 2009), products, services, process (Fisher, 2012; Gemmell et al., 2012), and venture performance (Katre & Salipante, 2012). Therefore, the content of the feedback has an instrumental role as a pathway toward venture emergence. However, my findings suggest that feedback seeking as an act, regardless of the content, can influence the venture emergence process depending on how the act is perceived by others. For example, seeking feedback can shape an entrepreneur's reputation based on how others perceive the act: as a sign of engagement or a sign of incompetence. Protection goals demonstrate that feedback seeking as an act can have an impact on resources, speed of progress, relationships, and reputation, regardless of the exact content of the feedback exchanged. Thus both the content and the act of seeking feedback can help entrepreneurs to achieve different goals toward venture emergence.

Considering that entrepreneurs pursue goals that drive them to both seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback simultaneously, the next chapter focuses on how they manage this contradiction.

CHAPTER SIX: AVOID OR APPROACH? FEEDBACK-SEEKING PARADOX AND STRATEGIES.

6.1. Introduction

The third findings chapter contributes to answering the second research question: *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?* Based on my analysis, this findings chapter conceptualises feedback seeking as a paradox of contradictory, yet interrelated goals and presents eight different feedback-seeking strategies. The chapter starts with details of the feedback-seeking paradox as an aggregated dimension integrating the second-order themes of development and protection feedback-seeking goals presented in the previous two chapters. In the following sections, I describe how entrepreneurs managed the feedback-seeking paradox with differentiation and integration strategies. I present a progressive data structure only for the aggregated dimension of *feedback-seeking strategies* in Table 6.1. The presentation of this aggregated dimension follows the data structure from the far right to the left to detail each second-order theme with its first-order categories. I present illustrative data to support the emergent model in relation to entrepreneurs' feedback-seeking strategies in Tables 6.2 and 6.3. I conclude with a summary of the findings presented in this chapter and a brief discussion of their relation to feedback-seeking research in organisational behaviour and entrepreneurship.

6.2. Contradictory and interrelated goals: Feedback seeking as a paradox

The feedback-seeking paradox, which I define as the persistently contradictory, yet interrelated goals entrepreneurs pursue with proactively seeking feedback and proactively refraining from seeking feedback, emerged as an aggregated dimension from my analysis. My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs' feedback seeking could be best described as a paradox of performing (Lewis, 2000;

Smith & Lewis, 2011) because development and protection goals motivated entrepreneurs to perform inconsistent actions (i.e. to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback) (see Chapter Two). In line with paradox theory (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) feedback-seeking goals *persistently posed contradictory*, yet *interrelated* demands on the entrepreneurs in terms of purpose and foci. When viewed separately, development and protection goals were logical. When viewed together, they were inconsistent because they promoted and inhibited feedback seeking simultaneously. Yet, when development and protection goals were viewed as a part of the venture emergence phenomenon, they were synergetic and interrelated. I describe these contradictory, yet interrelated aspects of feedback seeking next.

First, my analysis suggested that *feedback seeking posed competing and conflicting demands in terms of purpose*. On the one hand, feedback seeking posed competing demands on entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs had many simultaneous responsibilities in their ventures (e.g. payroll, marketing) as well as in their personal lives (e.g. childcare, education). These responsibilities competed with feedback seeking for resources, such as time, energy, effort, and attention. Given enough resources, the entrepreneurs could address all these responsibilities and engage in all activities. However, in a context of limited resources, the entrepreneurs prioritised how to allocate resources between feedback seeking and other tasks in the venture and in their personal lives. On the other hand, development and protection feedback-seeking goals posed conflicting demands on entrepreneurs. These goals were conflicting with each other because the achievement of protection goals required behaviours (i.e. not seeking feedback) that were incompatible with development goals (i.e. seeking feedback) whereby the movement toward one goal was a movement away from the other.

Managing uncertainty, competitiveness, reputation, and relationships exemplify the conflicts between development and protection goals. First, entrepreneurs sought feedback to reduce

response uncertainty, which meant minimising feelings of doubt, confusion, and lack of confidence. However, they also proactively refrained from seeking feedback because they considered how diverse or negative feedback could make it more difficult to make decisions and take action. Second, entrepreneurs sought feedback to enhance the competitiveness of their ventures by learning and improving offerings and their positioning. However, seeking feedback could also expose ideas to competing organisations and slow down progress, thus hindering the competitiveness of the venture and motivating entrepreneurs to refrain from seeking feedback. Lastly, entrepreneurs sought feedback to build reputation and involve others in the venture emergence process. However, entrepreneurs considered how seeking feedback could damage their current reputation or damage relationships with others. Thus, entrepreneurs were also motivated to refrain from seeking feedback to maintain and manage reputation and relationships. Overall, entrepreneurs perceived feedback seeking as both beneficial and harmful for uncertainty, competitiveness, reputation, and relationships.

In addition to identifying conflict between development and protection goals, my analysis also suggested conflict within the higher-order protection goal in relation to managing resources and relationships. On the one hand, entrepreneurs sought feedback from family members and friends to manage resources. These feedback sources were accessible professionals, for example in marketing and accounting, whom the entrepreneurs trusted. Entrepreneurs perceived seeking feedback from family members and friends to require fewer resources and involve fewer reputational and competitiveness risks due to proximity and higher trust compared to other feedback sources, such as peers or professionals outside of the entrepreneurs' networks. On the other hand, entrepreneurs refrained from seeking feedback from family members and friends to manage relationships. Seeking feedback from these individuals could be stressful and unpleasant for entrepreneurs and the feedback sources. When entrepreneurs were concerned with managing relationships with personally significant others, they refrained from

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seeking feedback to maintain a balance between the role of an entrepreneur and the individual with personal responsibilities, commitments, and social life.

Second, my analysis suggested that *development and protection goals posed conflicting demands across foci.* Development and protection feedback-seeking goals had different foci: the venture and the entrepreneur. Development goals focused on creating or enhancing capabilities and resources for the venture directly through improving and building reputation. They also created or enhanced individual capabilities and resources for the entrepreneur to benefit the venture indirectly through reducing response uncertainty, learning, and building reputation. However, protection goals focused not only on the venture (directly and indirectly), but also on the entrepreneur as a separate entity. My analysis suggested that the resource and relationship management goals partially focused on protecting the entrepreneurs as individuals with commitments and responsibilities outside of their ventures (e.g. childcare, positive encounters with family members). When entrepreneurs pursued these goals, they refrained from seeking feedback to protect themselves and others. Yet, they were also motivated to seek feedback to develop the venture through reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving, and building reputation. Developing the venture could have a negative influence on the individual and protecting the individual through refraining from feedback seeking could hinder the development of the venture.

In summary, my analysis indicated that seeking and not seeking feedback were different routes toward achieving different goals. Feedback-seeking goals presented different motivational forces and incompatible actions whereby the movement toward one goal was a movement away from another. Entrepreneurs proactively and deliberately sought feedback and refrained from seeking feedback to focus on different purposes or different foci.

Third, my analysis suggested that the conflicting and competing demands between and within higher-order goals described above were *persistent*. None of the participating entrepreneurs pursued only

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one goal or one set of higher-order goals (i.e. development or protection). They did not engage in either only seeking feedback or only refraining from seeking feedback. This highlighted that a single act or prioritisation of one goal or set of goals could not resolve the conflict. Instead all entrepreneurs pursued both development and protection goals and made multiple decisions. They also employed different strategies to manage the feedback-seeking conflict, as I will discuss in the next section. Daniel H.'s experiences exemplified this persistently conflicting nature of feedback seeking. Considering a specific feedback-seeking interaction, he wanted to seek feedback from potential investors to reduce response uncertainty about the legal structure of his venture. Yet, he was also concerned with his reputation and how the potential investors would perceive him. Considering seeking feedback from beneficiaries and customers in general, he recognised that seeking feedback from these sources enhanced the competitiveness of the venture by helping him design and improve products and services. Yet, he also considered how it hindered the competitiveness of the venture by slowing down the process of developing offerings.

Fourth, my analysis suggested that the conflicting and competing demands described above were *interrelated* in terms of purpose and foci. On the one hand, feedback-seeking goals were interrelated in terms of purpose. Based on my analysis, I inferred that without seeking feedback to develop and enhance capabilities and resources, entrepreneurs would have fewer capabilities and resources to protect. Yet, protecting capabilities, resources, and relationships to maintain a stable environment could enable entrepreneurs to develop new capabilities and resources. For example, without seeking feedback to develop and sell appealing products and services through learning and improving, there would be no competitiveness to maintain through refraining from seeking feedback to protect ideas. On the other hand, feedback-seeking goals were also interrelated across foci. Developing the entrepreneur also meant developing the venture. Entrepreneurs sought feedback to construct and enhance knowledge, skills, approaches, and

reputation, which benefited the venture. Protecting the entrepreneur also meant protecting the venture. Entrepreneurs refrained from seeking feedback to protect their reputation and not to be perceived as insecure, vulnerable, or lacking knowledge, which could also damage the reputation of the venture. Finally, developing and protecting a venture that survived and thrived also protected the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs sought feedback and refrained from seeking feedback to create operational ventures, thus protecting the individual from potential failure. Highlighting that seeking feedback about himself as an entrepreneur and the venture are separate but interrelated, Andrew explained:

> *I am new at this and the organisation is new so I need all information about my ability to develop and grow the organisation and the organisation's separate needs and how that is going to be built and grow it. They are different things. [...] I need to know I am doing the right stuff to lead the organisation but I also need to know that the organisation is positioning itself properly so that I am leading an organisation that is going in the right direction.*

6.3. Feedback-seeking strategies in response to the paradox

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs coped with the feedback-seeking paradox by using different strategies. I defined feedback-seeking strategies as entrepreneurs' everyday feedback-seeking activities. As an aggregated dimension, feedback-seeking strategies included two second-order themes: *differentiation* between development and protection goals across time, feedback sources, and/or content or *integration* of development and protection goals through novel solutions. I adopted the labels "differentiation" and "integration" from the paradox literature (e.g. Smith, 2014) as they could best describe the differences between the two groups of strategies. I identified eight strategies as first-order categories across all entrepreneurs, although not all entrepreneurs enacted all strategies. These strategies were temporal avoidance, source avoidance, segmentation of feedback sources, searching for new feedback sources, framing feedback requests, establishing feedback

relationships, creating feedback-seeking routines, and creating feedback channels. Avoiding (temporarily or source-related), segmenting, searching, and framing represented differentiation strategies. Establishing feedback relationships, creating feedback-seeking routines, and creating feedback channels represented integration strategies.

Entrepreneurs enacted both differentiation and integration strategies to maximise the benefits and minimise the potential negative outcomes of seeking feedback through the pursuit of development and protection goals. Overall, differentiation and integration strategies aided entrepreneurs to pursue all development and protection goals. However, differentiation and integration strategies allowed entrepreneurs to cope with the feedback-seeking paradox in different ways. The differentiation strategies were one-off activities leveraging trade-offs between development and protection goals. Entrepreneurs selected differentiation strategies for each feedback-seeking interaction. When considered individually, differentiation strategies had a short-term effect based on how entrepreneurs prioritised goals for a specific feedback-seeking interaction. However, when considered together, differentiation strategies had a long-term effect as entrepreneurs could combine them and switch between them to pursue multiple feedback-seeking goals with different interactions over time. This allowed entrepreneurs to attend to both development and protection goals. The integration strategies had a long-term effect by leveraging synergies between development and protection goals. They formalised feedback seeking and embedded it into the everyday actions of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs leveraged integration strategies to attend to both development and protection goals simultaneously. To describe the aggregated dimension of entrepreneurs' feedback-seeking strategies, I detail all eight strategies next following the data structure from right to left (see Table 6.1). I provide indicative data examples in Tables 6.2 and 6.3.

TABLE 6.1. DATA STRUCTURE FOR AGGREGATED DIMENSION: FEEDBACK-SEEKING STRATEGIES

First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimension
Temporal avoidance	Differentiation	Feedback-seeking strategies
Source avoidance		
Segmentation of feedback sources		
Searching for new feedback sources		
Framing feedback requests		
Establishing feedback relationships	Integration	
Creating feedback-seeking routines		
Creating feedback channels		

6.3.1. Differentiation

Differentiation emerged as a second-order theme from my analysis of entrepreneurs' responses to the feedback-seeking paradox. I define *differentiation as strategies that separate development and protection goals across time* (i.e. temporal avoidance), *sources* (i.e. source avoidance, segmentation, and searching)*, and content (i.e. segmentation and framing).* They were one-off events and activities that prioritised different goals and leveraged trade-offs in the short term. However, over time entrepreneurs could combine and switch between differentiation strategies, thus attending to both development and protection goals in the long term. I detail *temporal avoidance, source avoidance, segmentation of feedback sources, searching for new sources, and framing feedback requests* as the first-order categories that emerged from my analysis and underlie this second-order theme next.

6.3.1.1. Temporal avoidance

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used temporal avoidance to manage the feedback-seeking paradox. Temporal avoidance refers to refraining from seeking feedback for a specific period of time or delaying feedback-seeking activities. This strategy separated development and protection goals across time. As a short-

term solution, temporal avoidance of feedback seeking prioritised protection goals for a period of time, thus not addressing developmental goals. Temporal avoidance of feedback seeking was most common when attempting to manage resources. For example, when entrepreneurs prioritised marketing or payroll activities over feedback seeking. As entrepreneurs perceived feedback seeking to be a time-consuming process that competed with other activities, temporal avoidance conserved resources to attend to current needs. Entrepreneurs also used this strategy when they considered how best to use the resources of their sources. They avoided feedback seeking on some topics to conserve the source's resources for feedback on other topics or for other activities. However, temporal avoidance was also observed when pursuing all other protection goals: maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships, and maintaining reputation. In those situations, entrepreneurs temporarily prioritised protection goals and forwent the developmental benefits of seeking feedback. For example, Samantha had scheduled a second feedback meeting with the local tobacco control commission. When she became concerned with the potential competitiveness and reputational risks, she decided to postpone the meeting:

> So what can they do for me? Not much really. But it could do a lot of harm if she says they are not good. So that is the basis of this decision not to immediately jump into another meeting. I am not cancelling it. I am just deferring it.

6.3.1.2. Source avoidance

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used source avoidance to manage the feedback-seeking paradox. Source avoidance refers to refraining from seeking feedback from certain individuals or groups, thus separating development and protection goals across sources. Entrepreneurs used this strategy when they were concerned with maintaining competitiveness and managing relationships with significant others. First, when entrepreneurs were concerned that another organisation might appropriate their ideas and execute them quicker, they refrained from seeking feedback from organisations they did not trust or were addressing the same social

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issue. Second, when entrepreneurs were concerned that negative feedback may have an impact on their confidence and speed of progress, they avoided seeking feedback from people whom they perceived to be too negative toward their ideas. Finally, when entrepreneurs were concerned that seeking feedback could create tensions with their families and friends, they avoided seeking feedback from those groups and focused on seeking feedback from others. This strategy helped to minimise the potential negative outcomes of seeking feedback without completely avoiding feedback seeking. For example, Alister summarised how he and his business partner did not seek feedback from family members, who considered them workaholics, to avoid tensions with them:

> *It is not something for them. It is not something we involve them in because it makes life more difficult so we just get on with it. It is totally separate from our family lives. We don't talk about it and don't involve our families into this.*

6.3.1.3. Segmentation of feedback sources

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used segmentation of feedback sources to manage the feedback-seeking paradox. Segmentation refers to dividing feedback sources into different groups and seeking feedback on different topics. This strategy separated development and protection goals across both sources and content of feedback. Segmentation was used with any of the protection goals. Unlike avoidance strategies, segmentation provided entrepreneurs with some developmental opportunities to learn and/or to improve their offerings or the positioning of these offerings. In terms of managing resources, segmentation was seen as an effective and targeted way to gain feedback from experienced or specialised feedback sources without wasting time on feedback sources who were perceived as less valuable. This allowed entrepreneurs to gain the most of feedback seeking while minimising the time and effort required. In the case of maintaining and managing competitiveness, reputation, and relationships, segmentation allowed entrepreneurs to seek feedback from individuals they perceived to be less risky for the relevant protection goal, while still gaining useful

feedback. For example Daniel H. was planning to seek feedback about his investment offer and legal structure from a small number of investors whom he was not approaching to invest in his venture, which he considered to be safer for his reputation.

Not only did entrepreneurs divide feedback sources into groups, but they also separated development and protection goals across feedback topics. This meant that specific groups of feedback sources were asked for feedback only about certain topics. For example, Selena asked her economics professor for feedback on the content of her game and target markets, her father and brother for feedback on financing the venture, her friends for feedback on the promotional materials, and students for feedback on the actual game. Overall, segmentation was seen as a structured way to seek diverse feedback from individuals with different and sometimes highly specialised perspectives. Thus, entrepreneurs segmented feedback sources to minimise the potential negative outcomes of seeking feedback, while still leveraging the potential benefits for development. Angela J. summarises this approach to feedback seeking as being departmentalised:

> *I have these little pockets of people I speak to about different things. There are those two people I speak to about myself and then with the others I don't. It is only about the business. It is very much in departments and it works.*

6.3.1.4. Searching for new feedback sources

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used searching for new feedback sources to manage the feedback-seeking paradox. Searching refers to proactively reaching to individuals outside of the entrepreneurs' networks to ask them for feedback. This meant that entrepreneurs carefully selected and engaged new individuals specifically for feedback purposes, thus separating development and protection goals across sources. Searching was used when entrepreneurs were concerned with access to feedback sources and access to meaningful feedback. For example, when they perceived that no one in their immediate circles was an appropriate feedback source or provided honest feedback. This strategy was also

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leveraged when entrepreneurs were concerned with similar organisations appropriating their ideas or creating tensions with family members and friends.

Searching involved many different approaches. Entrepreneurs proactively worked to grow and change their networks through events and active feedback requests to people who were not in their immediate networks. They leveraged existing relationships and membership organisations for introductions to relevant feedback sources. For example, Angela J. asked the local Tourism Information Centre to introduce her to several restaurant owners to get feedback on her mobile application that showed the accessibility of venues. Entrepreneurs used social media to reach out to new feedback sources or to find events feedback sources may attend. For example, Selena used Twitter to reach out to a participant in The Apprentice to get feedback on her business model while Roger used LinkedIn to find out "where do education people go". Entrepreneurs travelled to similar organisations which were not considered competition because of their geographical location. For example, Olivia travelled to Los Angeles to get feedback on her venture because she envisioned her organisation to be "like the community arts organisations that I've kind of come across on my few trips to America". Finally, they applied to relevant schemes for peer learning and peer support. For example, Calvin applied for funding from a social entrepreneurship support organisation for a peer-learning event. He organised a "shed crawl" and visited several men's sheds in England to get feedback on his model of combining the men's sheds approach with income generating activities.

These different ways to search for feedback sources ensured that entrepreneurs would receive feedback from experienced (social) entrepreneurs or experts in specialised disciplines, such as behavioural economics, while minimising the risks of idea appropriation or tensions with family members and friends. Interestingly, one of the reasons for refraining from feedback seeking was the resources required to seek sources for feedback, which competed with other activities. However, seeking new sources for

feedback was also one of the strategies of coping with the paradox between development and protection goals when feedback seeking was prioritised over other activities.

6.3.1.5. Framing feedback requests

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used framing to manage the feedback-seeking paradox. Framing refers to carefully phrasing feedback requests to influence meaning and future actions, and to disclose only partial information. This meant that entrepreneurs were sometimes "careful what you say and how you say it" (Brandon). This strategy separated development and protection goals across feedback content because they used discourse in a way that prioritised some goals over others. Framing was leveraged when entrepreneurs struggled to gain honest feedback or were concerned with protecting their ideas from other organisations. Framing was perceived to help entrepreneurs gain valuable feedback while conserving resources and protecting their ideas. In terms of influencing meaning to gain honest feedback and reducing the resources required for it, entrepreneurs often had to warn others they would be asking for feedback, "positioning" and "signposting" their feedback requests with specific explanations of what they do, what they are asking for feedback on, and why being honest with the feedback is important. In terms of protecting their ideas from being appropriated by other organisations, entrepreneurs engaged in careful disclosure of partial information, thus protecting the most important aspects of their ideas. For example, Andrew carefully selected what to share when he was seeking feedback from potential competitors:

> *I learnt over the past few years that some people will absolutely just rip your idea off. So now I am cautious of the level of information that I share, about the methodology and the ideology, especially the actual IP copyrighted materials. But you can always tell people what you are doing without telling them how you are doing it. That's my strategy.*

TABLE 6.2. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF THEME: DIFFERENTIATION

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Temporal avoidance	"So there are certain times when I wouldn't ask for feedback" – Brandon "at times I don't even ask for feedback because it is so complex and different." – Daniel S.
Source avoidance	"my husband would get fed up of me talking about it, so I don't tend to talk about it at home" – Angela J. "I am concerned to go to some organisations, share my ideas and seek feedback because they might steal my ideas." – Josie B.
Segmentation of feedback sources	"There are certain things I will ask in the family and certain things I wouldn't." – Samantha "so the lecturer is for more academic things. I wouldn't go to her asking 'Should I change the colour of this card?' If I wanted to know about the colours, I'd go to a student. So I ask her directly 'Do you think this question is good or bad?' If it is something bigger like 'I am going to make more prototypes, what changes would you recommend?' […] And then my dad and my brother are more about running the business or I am thinking how to fund something like this" – Selena
Searching for new feedback sources	"It is me going after people like me meeting with Elly Layfield of Leeds University. I was the one who contacted her. I emailed her and said 'Look, I've got this project and I'd like you feedback. Can we meet?' – Tim "I really wanted to have some sort of feedback, but then I just got on the internet and started looking for people who might be able to help" – Sarah
Framing feedback requests	"But it being something completely new, I almost have to warn them that I will be asking them for feedback because it is often 'Oh, I've never thought about it. I don't know. I am not sure.' […] You just have to position it correctly, really explain to them what it is and signpost what exactly you want feedback on." – Peter "Instead of saying what do people think I ask a series of questions now about it and I say 'specifically about item 5 or paragraph 6'" – Angela J.

Entrepreneurs also used humour to influence future actions and warn feedback sources that they were aware of the possibility of idea appropriation. For example, Angela J. shared:

> When I share them I get quite positive feedback and that unnerves me a bit and then I always make a joke about it and say: "And if you pinch that idea I'll know who it is."

In summary, entrepreneurs managed the feedback-seeking paradox by employing differentiation strategies to respond to conflicting feedback-seeking goals in a specific feedback-seeking interaction. Entrepreneurs engaged in temporal or source avoidance, segmentation, searching, and framing to maximise the benefits and

minimise the potential negative outcomes of seeking feedback by leveraging trade-offs between goals and prioritising them differently across time, sources, and/or content.

6.3.2. Integration

Integration emerged as a second-order theme from my analysis of entrepreneurs' responses to the feedback-seeking paradox. I define *integration as strategies that combine development and protection goals with novel long-term feedback initiatives to leverage synergies.* Integration strategies were not used to address a specific conflict between two or more goals for a single feedback-seeking interaction. Instead, they aimed to simultaneously minimise the potential negative outcomes of seeking feedback while maximising benefits for the development of the entrepreneur or the venture in the long-term, across multiple feedback-seeking interactions. I detail *establishing feedback relationships*, *creating feedback-seeking routines*, and *creating feedback channels* as first-order categories underlying this second-order theme next.

6.3.2.1. Establishing feedback relationships

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs established feedback relationships to manage the feedback-seeking paradox in an integrative way. Establishing feedback relationships refers to the entrepreneurs' arrangements with individuals or groups whose main responsibility in relation to the entrepreneur or the venture is to provide feedback. This strategy included acquiring formal and informal mentors and personal advisors, organising informal peer support groups with other social entrepreneurs, creating feedback teams, and establishing formal and informal advisory groups very early in the venture emergence process. These individuals or groups varied in their backgrounds and relationships to the entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs selected them based on their experience, expertise, diversity of perspectives, trustworthiness, and commitment to the venture or the social issue in more general terms. Establishing

feedback relationships was considered effective in bringing diverse perspectives into the venture. These individuals were also considered to contribute with their detachment from the daily work of the entrepreneur and his/her venture, thus they were seen as more likely to be honest and objective in their feedback. For example, Dominic shared his approach to building an advisory group as an important mechanism to get feedback:

> We set up a steering group. We don't need to have a management committee, but we invited a group of other professionals who we knew to act in advisory capacity. […] [W]e meet once a quarter to give them information about what we are doing, updating them, getting feedback so "Have you tried this? Have you tried that? What about this? You didn't mention that. Maybe you should look at this." So we get feedback from a group of professionals who we call our steering group or advisory group.

Establishing feedback relationships brought customers and beneficiaries closer to the venture and its decision-making processes. Entrepreneurs who established feedback relationships often involved individuals who were supposed to represent customers or beneficiaries. They were engaged as feedback sources to serve as the voice of customers and beneficiaries within the venture to share feedback on the offerings and how to make them more appealing and accessible. For example, Alister involved his eight most influential customers as an advisory group to seek feedback about improvements to the game and its future marketing and distribution. In an extreme case of building feedback structures, Sam established a share-holding team whose members were responsible to act as representatives of the beneficiaries and customers. They were considered advisory co-founders or co-creators of the digital platform and were only responsible for giving and seeking feedback in exchange for 15% shares in the venture. This feedback team involved a group of teenagers to represent the beneficiaries and a professional social worker to represent social services as a customer segment. Sam also considered such feedback from beneficiaries and customers to bring additional credibility to the venture by demonstrating that the products and

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services were built with the feedback of service users, and were therefore more likely to meet their needs. Sam considered the 15%-stake in the venture to be essential because "they also have an incentive to give us good feedback and help us build a good product because they have a share in the company". He summarised the role of the advisory co-creators with the following statement:

> So they are not big roles officially and only involve a few hours of work, but they are crucial for us because they bring these new perspectives from different worlds and can give us feedback about different parts of the project that we don't have much experience in and give us more credibility.

My analysis indicated that establishing feedback relationships created synergies between all development goals and the protection goals of managing resources and maintaining competitiveness. In terms of development goals, establishing feedback relationships provided entrepreneurs with consistent opportunities to reduce response uncertainty by involving customers and beneficiaries in various decisions, to learn from individuals with diverse experiences and expertise, and to improve their offerings. Some entrepreneurs also used this strategy to build credibility and reputation by demonstrating customer and beneficiary involvement and input to outsiders. Entrepreneurs considered that this would help them to build trust and an image of engaged ventures. In terms of protection goals, establishing feedback relationships increased the accessibility to feedback sources and meaningful feedback in the long term, thus reducing the resources required to seek feedback. As entrepreneurs carefully selected the individuals they engaged with in feedback relationships based on trust, existing relationships, or incentives, they were also less concerned with maintaining competitiveness due to idea appropriation by the feedback sources. Almost as a by-product, this strategy was seen to increase entrepreneurs' sense of accountability and steer them into action because they were "reporting to someone", instead of being "only me". This could help entrepreneurs to overcome the slow progress effects of feedback seeking to maintain competitiveness. Calvin summarised the benefit

of accountability and pressure driven by establishing feedback relationships:

> I've been doing stuff and playing, but now I've got to start working. I am about to set up a steering group because up until now I've been managing myself. And I am too kind on myself, I don't crack the whip enough. […] So I've identified about half a dozen people who I will choose to be on a steering group because they have specific expertise or specific connections. […] Even if that group meets only once a month for an hour at least I could have that pressure, if you like, to work harder. To work harder on the job, rather than playing on the job.

6.3.2.2. Creating feedback-seeking routines

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs created feedback-seeking routines to manage the feedback-seeking paradox in an integrative way. Creating feedback-seeking routines refers to regularly occurring and planned events or habits during which entrepreneurs seek feedback. Such routines occurred at different time intervals such as biweekly, monthly or even quarterly, but regardless of the time frame, individual entrepreneurs considered them to be "regular" activities instead of one-off events. Entrepreneurs created diverse routines with different feedback sources. They attended regular events with other social or commercial entrepreneurs and actively sought feedback from the attendees. They created and followed rules of thumb, such as always to ask customers, beneficiaries, and staff members for feedback after each service delivery, to seek feedback after every meeting with a potential customer or after unsuccessful negotiations with potential customers. They made it a personal rule of thumb to reach out to a small group of customers or individual beneficiaries informally on a regular basis to discuss "how it's going" for them. They started weekly one-to-one meetings with staff members or had a rule to ask staff members for feedback before making big decisions. For example, Daniel H. described his meetings with staff members as one routine he created to seek feedback:

> So I have one-to-ones every single week with the staff now […] I'm asking for feedback in my one-to-ones with staff – so

feedback on how they feel the business is going, how they feel other members of staff are going, how they feel I'm going.

My analysis indicated that creating feedback-seeking routines introduced synergies between the development goals of response uncertainty reduction, learning, and improving and the protection goals of managing resources, maintaining competitiveness, and managing relationships with significant others. When entrepreneurs engaged in creating feedback-seeking routines, they sought feedback from other social or commercial entrepreneurs, customers, beneficiaries, and staff members, while family members and friends were never mentioned in entrepreneurs' discourse in relation to feedback-seeking routines. In terms of development goals, routines were seen as a way to ensure entrepreneurs received enough feedback to learn from other social or commercial entrepreneurs, to reduce response uncertainty, and to improve offerings based on feedback from staff, (potential) customers, and beneficiaries. Creating feedback-seeking routines aided entrepreneurs to conserve resources. The strategy reduced the long-term effort required to plan for and engage in one-off feedback-seeking events and made feedback sources more accessible. Creating feedback-seeking routines aided entrepreneurs to maintain competitiveness. Because routines included regular feedback seeking from other social and commercial entrepreneurs, they allowed entrepreneurs to build trust with these feedback sources and potentially reduce the fear of a feedback source appropriating their ideas. Finally, creating feedback-seeking routines aided entrepreneurs to manage relationships with personally significant others. This integration strategy allowed entrepreneurs to receive enough feedback from other social or commercial entrepreneurs, staff, customers, and beneficiaries, thus relying less on family and friends for feedback. This helped entrepreneurs to avoid tensions with personally significant others by seeking feedback from them less frequently.

6.3.2.3. Creating feedback channels

My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs created feedback channels to manage the feedback-seeking paradox in an integrative way. Creating feedback channels refers to building communication platforms through which feedback sources can share feedback in response to an ongoing request. Entrepreneurs created numerous feedback channels mostly focused on asking customers and beneficiaries for feedback. These channels were sometimes less personal and relied on (high and low) technology-mediated communication, but they were seen as a way to make feedback giving easier for sources. In terms of using high-technology channels, entrepreneurs built websites and blogs with sections for comments, created Whatsapp groups, and asked for feedback on social media platforms, such as Twitter and LinkedIn. They also published monthly e-newsletters with invitations for feedback on specific topics or issues. In terms of low-technology channels, entrepreneurs asked beneficiaries to vote on suggestions for improvements using self-adhesive dots, magnets for white boards, or sticky notes. One entrepreneur used coffee beans in mugs as a way to select the opening hours for a community bike coffee shop and workshop based on the feedback of customers (Lisa). However, creating and leveraging feedback channels did not refer only to technology-mediated communication. Entrepreneurs also created spaces to engage in feedback seeking with beneficiaries and staff in very informal and personal ways. Such strategies included user forums, consultations, open meetings, and coffee mornings, which were open to various beneficiary groups with the purpose to seek feedback about existing and new offerings. They also included regular away days with staff members.

My analysis indicated that creating feedback channels introduced synergies between the development goals of response uncertainty reduction and improving and the protection goals of managing resources and reputation. In terms of development goals, creating feedback channels aided entrepreneurs in reducing response uncertainty about the desirability of offerings and improving

them. Entrepreneurs considered that three main features of feedback channels could enhance the quality of feedback to reduce response uncertainty and improve offerings. First, the numerous and diverse feedback channels entrepreneurs developed provided opportunities for beneficiaries, customers, and staff to give feedback when and how they wanted. Second, entrepreneurs considered that feedback channels could be more comfortable for feedback sources to provide negative and critical feedback instead of a face-to-face interaction with the entrepreneur. These two features aided reducing response uncertainty and improving offerings because they arguably enhanced access to meaningful feedback by making it easier for feedback sources to share their ideas and opinions. This was seen as particularly important for marginalised beneficiary groups who traditionally did not have a voice to share their ideas and opinions or when they were grateful because similar services had not been provided to them in the past. Such feedback channels were considered to make feedback less personal and easier to give, thus more accessible for entrepreneurs. Third, feedback channels allowed multiple people to provide feedback simultaneously and even contribute to and build on each other's feedback, thus enhancing its quality for development. Clinton considered the open feedback meetings to be an environment of "Everybody coming together as a collective and providing that real joint-up stimulus that we all need and joint-up discussion and feedback."

In terms of protection goals, creating feedback channels aided entrepreneurs in managing resources and maintaining their reputation. While creating feedback channels required resources to set up the communication platforms at the beginning, this integration strategy conserved resources to seek feedback on the same or similar topics in the long term because entrepreneurs did not have to plan each feedback-seeking interaction. Creating feedback channels aided entrepreneurs in maintaining, and even building, their reputation. Because certain feedback channels were less personal and direct, they potentially limited the risk for entrepreneurs to expose their personal vulnerabilities and insecurities, while

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demonstrating that they wanted to engage beneficiaries and customers and respond to their needs. Eva summarised the importance of creating feedback channels with a comparison to the National Health Services:

And that brings people in and people are keen to give you an honest and a true response. So I'd like to do that continually and have the avenue to do that continually and involve people throughout instead of waiting for a questionnaire to come around after 6 months. I was at the A&E and it was a terrible visit. […] I joked about it, but there is such a lack of channels of communication with them.

TABLE 6.3. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF THEME: INTEGRATION

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Establishing feedback relationships	"I was getting mentoring from someone who was amazing but she had to leave so I don't have a mentor in that respect to seek feedback. So I contacted somebody yesterday to see whether I can get a new mentor." – Lisa
	"And to push me further as an individual and grow, I work with this group of people to identify how to develop and grow. So for instance, when I first had that group in place to discuss how to develop the organisation, there were about 6 people who stood up and offered to help. They were either from different social enterprises or large organisations and interested in what I was trying to develop. I kept in touch with them and now we have sort of formulated a sort of an advisory group and they help and advice me and allow me to bounce off ideas back and forth with them. So I might develop something or have an idea to develop something, talk with them and they comment on it. Sometimes I tell them 'I've done this for the website, will you have a look at it and feedback on whether it fits the target.' or something to do with their own industry because one of the organisations is a really big marketing company in Birmingham. So he's got an eye for marketing and he'll give me plenty of feedback if I ask him 'What do you think about the way I am marketing this?' and he will tell me whether he thinks that will work or not." – Angela J.
Creating feedback-seeking routines	"I've had a lot of business meetings in the last 4 months. I always email them the day after and say 'I really enjoyed that meeting. I'd really appreciated your feedback. How do I come across as an individual? What do you think about the idea? And I will be very pleased if you are honest with me.'" – Peter
	"We meet every Thursday every week to go through... We just have meetings and discuss what we are doing, what we need to be doing next so they give us a lot of feedback and help with idea generation about what we should be doing." – Sam
Creating feedback channels	"And then on ongoing basis people have the option to come to meetings that we organise, very open meetings, to help shape the structure of the garden and have input in the physical plan and the design of the place." – Clinton
	"We sometimes use just coloured dots and we actually propose things that might help and improve. So we might say 'These are six things that we think might improve things. Put a dot if you agree with us,' and they might just put those dots in one of them." – Angela J.

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In summary, entrepreneurs managed the feedback-seeking paradox by employing integration initiatives to respond to conflicting feedback-seeking goals across multiple situations. Entrepreneurs established feedback relationships and created feedback-seeking routines and feedback channels as novel solutions that leveraged synergies between development and protection goals in the long-term. Such initiatives required resources to set up initially, but they embedded feedback seeking into the everyday actions of entrepreneurs, thus influencing feedback seeking across multiple interactions, instead of a single interaction.

6.4. Chapter summary and discussion

In this third findings chapter I focused on addressing the second research question that guided this thesis: *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?* In addressing this research question I inferred that entrepreneurs' specific feedback-seeking strategies were influenced by paradoxical tensions between development and protection goals. My analysis revealed that development and protection goals presented contradictory, yet interrelated demands on entrepreneurs to proactively seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback. Entrepreneurs responded to the feedback-seeking paradox in eight different ways. They engaged in temporal and source avoidance, segmenting, searching, and framing to differentiate development and protection goals across time, sources, and/or content and leverage short-term trade-offs between the goals. They established feedback relationships and created feedback-seeking routines and feedback channels to integrate development and protection goals and leverage synergies between them in the long term. The findings presented in this empirical chapter enrich our conceptualisation of how exactly entrepreneurs, and individuals at work in general, seek feedback or refrain from seeking feedback in two different ways.

First, my findings enrich and complicate our understanding of how entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback by illuminating the nuances of feedback-seeking strategies. Previous

entrepreneurship research vaguely portrays entrepreneurs as either seeking feedback as part of other processes, such as innovation (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015), through face-to-face interactions, blog posts or other technology-mediated communication (Fisher, 2012; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015), or not seeking feedback at all (Katre & Salipante, 2012). However, my findings demonstrate that seeking feedback and even refraining from seeking feedback can take different forms. I identified six different strategies entrepreneurs can use to seek feedback through a variety of media and two different strategies to refrain from seeking feedback. These strategies can involve one-off interactions with different people on different topics with carefully crafted requests. They can also involve novel long-term initiatives that formalise and embed feedback seeking into entrepreneurs' daily activities. Additionally, entrepreneurs can use a number of high- and low-tech channels to seek feedback: from websites, newsletters, emails, and different social media platforms to coffee beans and sticky notes. They can also dedicate space and time for seeking feedback, such as user forums and coffee mornings.

Second, my findings advance our conceptualisation of feedback seeking beyond a mere avoid/approach phenomenon. Past research in entrepreneurship (Katre & Salipante, 2012) and organisational behaviour (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Anseel et al., 2015) portrays individuals as seeking or not seeking feedback. This contingency approach assumes that feedback seeking is an "either/or" phenomenon that is approached or avoided. However, my findings demonstrate that feedback-seeking is not a binary. Instead, entrepreneurs engage in various forms of seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback. They proactively avoid seeking feedback in different ways (i.e. temporal avoidance or source avoidance) and seek feedback with numerous short- and long-term strategies. My findings conceptualise feedback seeking as a paradoxical phenomenon. They reframe it from an "either/or" approach of investigating how frequently individuals seek feedback to a "both/and" approach of investigating how exactly individuals seek feedback.

CHAPTER SEVEN: AVOID OR APPROACH? AMBIDEXTROUS FEEDBACK SEEKING FOR VENTURE EMERGENCE.

7.1. Introduction

This is the final findings chapter that presents the details of an emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence, thus addressing the third research question: *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?* (see Figure 3.2). This findings chapter reveals venture emergence as a paradox that triggers feedback seeking (or lack thereof) and investigates how an overall ambidextrous approach to feedback seeking can influence venture emergence through two feedback-seeking enablers. I present progressive data structures for the aggregated dimensions of *venture emergence paradox* and *feedback-seeking enablers* in Tables 7.1 and 7.5, respectively. The presentation of these aggregated dimensions follows the data structures from the far right to the left to detail each second-order theme with its first-order categories. I present illustrative or aggregated data to support the emergent model in relation to the venture emergence paradox and the feedback-seeking enablers in Tables 7.2, 7.3, 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8. I conclude with a summary of the findings presented in this chapter and a brief discussion of their relation to feedback seeking and venture emergence.

7.2. Venture emergence paradox triggers feedback seeking

My analysis revealed that feedback seeking did not occur in a vacuum. Instead venture emergence, which is the process of turning an idea into an operational venture (Dimov, 2010), triggered feedback seeking. To establish operational ventures, entrepreneurs engage in activities, such as starting marketing efforts, registering an organisation, launching a website (e.g. Davidsson & Honig, 2003),

and strive for milestones, such as first sale (e.g. Newbert, 2005). My analysis suggested that venture emergence could be best described as a paradox of performing (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) for the entrepreneurs because it presented them with contradictory, yet interrelated, activities, tasks, and demands. Therefore, I define *venture emergence paradox as the persistently contradictory, yet interrelated activities, tasks, and demands entrepreneurs engage with when developing new operational ventures.* Two second-order themes underlie the venture emergence paradox: thriving and coping. Thriving refers to a strategic goal to develop new or enhanced capabilities and resources, while coping refers to the necessity to deal with the realities of daily life and responding to current needs as an entrepreneur and an individual. The following three sections detail each one of the themes and their relation to the feedback-seeking goals and then discuss how they co-exist imposing contradictory demands on entrepreneurs.

TABLE 7.1. DATA STRUCTURE FOR AGGREGATED DIMENSION: VENTURE EMERGENCE PARADOX

First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimension
Leaving a legacy	Thriving	Venture emergence paradox
Engaging in personal and professional development		
Growing responsibly		
"It is only me."	Coping	
Limited personal resources		
Being flexible, adaptable, and reactive		

7.2.1. Thriving and development feedback-seeking goals

Thriving is a strategic goal that refers to a desired-end state of a venture that is a self-sustaining and flourishing entity regardless of the involvement of the initial entrepreneur. Three first-order categories underpinned this second-order theme: *leaving a legacy, engaging in personal and professional development,* and *growing responsibly.* These experiences and activities were targeted toward

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building or enhancing capabilities and resources for the venture. Such new or enhanced capabilities and resources could aid the development of the venture by establishing foundations, introducing new offerings, targeting new audiences, expanding geographically, and changing systems and perceptions. These activities ensured the longevity of the venture and its social impact, beyond the individual entrepreneur. Thriving as a strategic goal triggered development feedback-seeking goals because seeking feedback enabled entrepreneurs to build or enhance capabilities and resources. Thus, thriving was a higher-order goal that could activate development feedback-seeking goals, which were at a lower level and more immediate to the entrepreneur.

The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed they aimed to *leave a legacy*. "Leaving a legacy" emerged as an in-vivo code that captured the entrepreneurs' ambition to build "something bigger than me" that they could leave to others as a tangible entity. This did not refer to continuation of the entrepreneurs' positive reputation or generating wealth for their families. Instead my analysis revealed that entrepreneurs used "legacy" to describe the desired longevity of both the venture and its social impact even when the entrepreneur was not involved. Entrepreneurs recognised that they could achieve this only if they built the foundations of a venture that others could take forward; a venture that would continue not only to exist but to thrive with or without the initial entrepreneur. Angela J. exemplifies this desire to leave behind a legacy:

> *I could have just done this all on my own on a consultancy basis, but it would have never been any bigger than me and what I want to do is to create something that's bigger than me, that supports more people than I could have ever supported alone and it carries on after me.*

Leaving a legacy required developing or enhancing venture capabilities and resources. The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that this involved building the fundamental elements of a venture: those taken-for-granted elements that may seem obvious to those leading large organisations (or researching them). Yet building these fundamental elements was a new and essential experience for the

entrepreneurs. First, this included forging sustainable revenue streams through a structured approach of researching, developing, testing, and refining business models with specific offerings to specific customers with specific pricing structures. The second fundamental venture element the entrepreneurs developed was new processes, procedures, and structures, such as formal communication channels and staff structures, defined roles and values, formal approach to measuring, monitoring, and improving social impact and performance as a venture. The entrepreneurs considered this to be essential for the venture to operate effectively, win large contracts, and stimulate lasting social impact on a large scale, without relying only on the entrepreneur. Some entrepreneurs established formal processes and procedures to replicate their methods because they worked effectively and efficiently. These entrepreneurs codified and documented methods, activities, and processes in a way that others could replicate, thus increasing their social impact. The third fundamental venture element the entrepreneurs developed was a professional and favourable external image. They aimed to present their ventures as credible and professional providers of quality offerings by defining core communication messages, developing branded communication vehicles, and gaining certifications and quality marks. Most entrepreneurs wanted external parties, such as beneficiaries, customers, investors, and funders, to see them as "serious business" (Pradip). Colin summarised his approach to establishing a strong and consistent external image:

> *It was quite a big change for us in terms of what we tell potential clients and how we talk about ourselves and making sure that everyone in the company understands that so we say the same things when we meet with professionals and go to events to increase our exposure. We don't want a few people of the company to meet the same person and tell them different things. We want to build a consistent brand and have us known for what we do and who we are. I guess we are trying to build a stronger brand and be seen as more professional.*

Developing new capabilities and resources involved engaging in *personal and professional development*. Personal and professional

development refers to improving approaches and personal styles of launching and managing a venture: leading individuals, communicating with potential customers, dealing with personal "fears and insecurities" (Roger), and doing things for the first time. Entrepreneurs recognised that the development of a thriving venture that would last beyond the initial founder was limited by and dependent on their personal skills and abilities: "[t]he moving of it is limited by the individual" (Angela J.). For example, Angela N. stated the purpose of engaging in personal and professional development: "I am very well aware that I am not a natural entrepreneur actually and I need to make up and improve the bits I struggle with." Entrepreneurs improved their skills, approaches, and styles of launching and managing a venture through a variety of developmental activities, such as formal courses, webinars, action learning sets, residential events, and reading books, blogs, and articles. As Josephine summarised her transformational experience of personal and professional development:

> *[…] when Jess and I started we didn't know what we were doing. We hadn't got a clue. We were social workers who were businesswomen and that is slowly changing now to businesswomen who are social workers.*

Finally, developing new or enhanced capabilities and resources involved *growing responsibly.* This refers to organising a lasting collective of individuals around the venture in a way that was responsible to both the venture and the individuals. First, the entrepreneurs attempted to organise a collective in a way that was responsible to the venture. They attempted to be financially and operationally careful in their approach to organising a collective. Financially, many of the entrepreneurs took the concern of being able to afford to hire individuals seriously. Operationally, growing responsibly to a collective involved finding, training, and retaining individuals who shared the vision and values of the venture, thus creating a sense of belonging and ensuring the continuity and longevity of the venture. Second, the entrepreneurs attempted to organise a collective in a way that was responsible to the individuals

involved. They considered how involving others as volunteers, employees, supporters, and partners would benefit not just the venture, but also the individuals. Entrepreneurs aimed to provide secure employment and opportunities they would be interested in. In Peter's words:

> I think it is important that you do that responsibly because you are messing with people's careers. If you've not got that sustainable income to be able to pay them regularly, they have families as well, so it is very irresponsible of me to get them on for one job and then let them go two months later. That is why I want to do it very responsibly

Growing responsibly involved several different methods of organising a collective. First, entrepreneurs used traditional methods of organising a collective, such as finding, training, and retaining the right talent as volunteers and employees. For example, June realised there was a lack of professionally trained seamstresses to produce upcycled clothing lines, "[s]o I need to factor in the time to train people to grow. I need to train." Second, entrepreneurs appointed steering groups, non-executive directors, and patrons who did not provide day-to-day resources and work, but supported the development of the "bigger picture". They supported the entrepreneurs in strategy development and raised awareness of the venture and its work. For example, Angela J. appointed a poet with a disability as a patron of her venture. Third, entrepreneurs formed formal and informal partnership with other individuals and organisations to design, produce, and deliver offerings together that neither party could do on its own: "that makes a really good, solid whole. None of us could do what the other one does" (Angela J.). Fourth, entrepreneurs employed more distributed approaches and relied on organic and loosely formed groups of supporters and active community participation. For example, Local Sights developed a strong community of individuals and organisations that provided supplies, equipment, pro bono work, and opportunities for the young people to engage in different projects. Overall, the entrepreneurs undertook a very careful approach to growing collectives around their ventures to gain more capabilities and resources, stimulate more

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social impact, and ensure the longevity of the venture. Josie H. highlighted the importance of carefully selecting whom to involve in terms of their personal values and the future of the venture:

> *it might be that they'll start moving away from perhaps some of the values that I had and I would find that very difficult because my loyalty is to the candidates and what I wouldn't want to do is to change that so that we put candidates at risk just to get more employers on board. So, you know, those sorts of things I'd find extremely difficult and I think that's why it would be a lengthy process. So it wouldn't just be advertise, find somebody, give them the company. We'd work together for some length of time so that I'd get a feel for what their ethos is and they'd get a feel for what the foundation is and if it didn't look like it was going to work, then there's time to try something different*

In summary, thriving was a strategic goal with a focus on developing and enhancing. For this goal, the entrepreneurs engaged in a number of different activities to build or enhance capabilities and resources for the venture: building sustainable revenue streams, developing and documenting processes, procedures, and structures, establishing a favourable public image, and ensuring the appropriate human capital was in place. This focus on developing and enhancing capabilities and resources also triggered entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. Entrepreneurs sought feedback to pursue development feedback-seeking goals, which enhanced existing or developed new individual or venture capabilities (e.g. entrepreneurs' skills and approaches) and resources (e.g. reputation) that enabled a thriving venture.

7.2.2. Coping and protection feedback-seeking goals

Coping is a response to the challenges of starting a new venture and confronting the necessities of daily life as an entrepreneur and an individual in an effort to protect what has been achieved so far. Three first-order categories underpinned this second-order theme: *"It is only me.", limited personal resources,* and *being flexible, adaptable, and reactive.* These experiences and activities were targeted toward maintaining existing capabilities and resources; toward survival. The entrepreneurs experienced the

TABLE 7.2. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF THEME: THRIVING

First-order categories	Illustrative data
Leaving a legacy	"My personal ambition is to leave behind something which is sustainable, financially sustainable, which is environmentally responsible and brings health and social benefits to enough men" – Calvin "I'd like in 15 years to take a back seat and perhaps remain a director, perhaps not, but to have other people in the community to take our venture and move it forward in a lasting way as a music, sports and arts centre for our community. That is my goal." – Sandra " we are building some really nice presentation packages that will fit really nicely blue chip clients rather than just photocopies and such. So that working capital is going not really for me to go and buy a Maserati, but it is going for being able to look professional, to look professional as an organisation" – Peter
Engaging in personal and professional development	"It is about finding other ways to develop myself and my ability. I am always asking for feedback and going to leadership courses and things in order to improve my abilities to meet the needs of the organisation." – Andrew "Now I've got School for Social Entrepreneurs and that is amazing because I am getting motivated. I am getting my brain fed and learning." – Samantha
Growing responsibly	"so that we can keep people's jobs secure. So like I think that's really my main concern because I think it would be a real shame for us to just leave and people to lose their jobs. So in a way I've not really thought too much about that aspect of it. I'm more thinking about how can we make sure that there's enough money coming in so that people can stay in jobs because the reality is if somebody who's working full-time – because we have two people who work full-time now – if two people who are working full-time lose their jobs, then there'll be a cost to the city because that means they won't be going out and having a drink anywhere and they won't be buying lunch anywhere. They'll be unemployed and they'll be looking for a new job and that's a really bad case scenario generally for everyone. " – Pradip "I feel that something which we kind of stumbled across is the community and the beneficiary involvement in delivering what we deliver and I suppose partly it's happened naturally here. We've offered volunteering work experience opportunities to people and that has just grown and grown and grown and we have about between 10 and 15 beneficiaries giving their time with us now. Some of them work out very well, some of them not so well, but the majority move onto something positive at the end of it. Some have started working with us, others have gone to work elsewhere. Some of them have got onto training courses that they weren't considering before and so on. I think that's something we're really trying to develop because we see there's something quite powerful in it." — Daniel H.

venture emergence process as a departure to "unknown territory" (Roger) that involved passing through "bridges" (Clinton), "barriers" (Josie H.), "crossroads" (Laura), "roller-coasters" (Daniel H.), and "whirlwinds" (Peter). In this context, finding ways to deal with daily challenges, unexpected events, and difficult situations as an entrepreneur and an individual was

perceived as essential to simply continue to work on the venture, to continue to exist as an entity. Tim's words summarised coping as doing one's best to survive: "I am just trying to start it. You know doing my best contacting people, going to meetings, and take it day to day really." Coping triggered protection feedback-seeking goals because refraining from seeking feedback enabled entrepreneurs to protect existing capabilities and resources, to protect progress and achievements.

The entrepreneurs' experience of *"It is only me."* shaped their focus on protecting achievements, capabilities, and resources. The entrepreneurs often reflected on how alone and isolated they felt and used the phrase "It is only me." to summarise the initial periods of the venture emergence process. They used the phrase to describe not only loneliness and isolation, but also to reflect that they had not built anything tangible yet. As Samantha exclaimed: "I am nothing. It is just me." They were the venture and they were responsible for everything in the venture: from designing and delivering offerings, to building websites, to recruiting volunteers. This meant that they often focused on "doing the doing" (Angela J.), maintaining and using existing capabilities and resources, taking it day by day, and "keeping on keeping on" (Daniel S.). While "It is only me." mostly reflected the entrepreneurs' feelings of isolation and loneliness, the experience was also perceived to influence their resources.

The entrepreneurs' *limited personal resources* they could input into the venture shaped their focus on protecting achievements, capabilities, and resources. Reflecting the experience of "It is only me.", the entrepreneurs often shared that they did not have enough time and energy to do everything that they deemed was needed to develop or enhance capabilities and resources. That was because they concentrated on the aspects of the venture that needed immediate attention, such as delivering contracted services and projects, which was an exhausting experience. Additionally, the entrepreneurs had personal lives with commitments to family members, friends, and their personal development, such as completing their university education. Everyday commitments, such

as childcare, and one-off events, such as pregnancy or terminal illness of loved ones, limited the time and energy they could invest in the development of the venture. As nascent entrepreneurs, many of the participants had other full- or part-time jobs, took on freelancing projects, or were portfolio entrepreneurs. Several entrepreneurs who worked only on their ventures faced pressure from their families and personal circumstances to consider finding an additional job while working on the venture. This meant that entrepreneurs worked to address immediate issues and maintain what they had already achieved, instead of developing or enhancing capabilities and resources. For example, Roger had left his full-time job to start Able Generation, however, he had to start looking for additional work:

> *I am at a stage now financially where I am looking for alternative work, to get a part-time job just for financial stability because I really have gone as long as I can without earning very much at all. […] so what I have to prioritise now is to get some paid work quickly even if that means that I have to seek another paid job and just prioritise my finances and try to make something of the business in the background really, which isn't ideal but it's just the reality of I have other obligations that I need to prioritise at the moment.*

Coping involved *being flexible, adaptable, and reactive* to protect achievements, capabilities, and resources. The entrepreneurs perceived that a flexible approach to financing, structures, processes, and procedures could allow them to ensure the survival of the venture and protect what they had achieved so far in a context of limited personal resources. First, the entrepreneurs adopted flexible approaches to finance their ventures. They kept pricing and spending flexible and did not use structured budget planning: "So, you know, I don't particularly divide up what budgets we have. The money just goes where it needs to go." (Josie H.). Second, the entrepreneurs maintained minimal, informal, and adaptable structures, process, and procedures. They made do with minimal processes and exploited the structures they already had until forced to make changes: "I don't think the process and the infrastructure that I've got of me in a home office will be able to cope for much longer." (Peter). They responded to new obstacles as they occurred and made changes to address

TABLE 7.3. ILLUSTRATIVE DATA SUPPORTING INTERPRETATIONS OF THEME: COPING

First-order categories	Illustrative data
"It is only me."	"I am a one-man band." — Tim "It is only me so there isn't really a structure. Just me getting clients, preparing the training, delivering it, designing the new programmes, trying to find funding." — Angela J.
Limited personal resources	"Time management and my energy. This camp has been full-on and it has just been me. I've been let down by volunteers and, you know, I've planned all the teaching and I've planned the whole programme and running the administration of it. With the after school club I have during the day, so between 9 and 2, to do a lot of my administrative work and then when I come back after the school club I can do more, but these past three weeks I've not been able to do that. I've literally come back and I'm tired, so after preparing dinner and eating it I'm out. I don't go to bed before 10 o'clock. That's never me, but I'm going to bed before 10. […] So my usual time for kind of doing outreach and sending out emails and catching up on things I've just not been able to do. I've just not, I'm tired. […] so someone like me doing it alone and balancing it with motherhood and doing all that. Admittedly these past three weeks have really stretched me in ways I just hadn't realised and the impact of that on the growth or not even just the growth but just in terms of the business running and being able to operate." — Olivia "I want to make this successful and I'd like this to be my main source of income so that I know I can just dedicate my time to this rather than doing lots of other little pieces which is what I am doing at the moment." — Robin "because sometimes you need to take the pressure off. It was getting very pressurised at times and I thought I needed to take time off because you know you spend all your time working on this and you have a family and a day job." — Samantha
Being flexible, adaptable, and reactive	"It is very flexible. I take money from anyone who agrees to give me money. Some organisations have given us only a few hundred pounds while others have given us a few thousand pounds. We take anything people want to give us." – Andrew "If it means that I have to reduce my price in order to get some business, then maybe I've got the flexibility to do that" — Roger "The whole ethos of the company is about flexibility. A lot of people are similar to myself and need to go to the doctor or the hospital quite regularly, sometimes they might not be able to work. So the whole venture is set up exactly for this sort of flexibility so they can go to the hospital whenever they need it." — Brandon "The thing about the pop-up is that it is low risk. If you are trying to do something bigger at a real venue, you are tied with a lease and you can't move or take on new opportunities but with the pop-ups we can try lots of different venues in Portsmouth. And also the other thing I am realising is that we could go to festivals if we want to because we can just pop up, we can just move to wherever we want to." – Pradip "And what we are trying to do here is to move away from that and provide an open environment where people are not restricted by too many, if any, rules around that engagement." – Clinton

them. For example, Andrew developed a new teacher enterprise resource because "I think I had underestimated how much of an obstacle teachers really are to reach the young people."

In summary, coping was the entrepreneurs' response to the challenges and necessities of daily life as an entrepreneur and an individual with a focus on maintaining existing capabilities, resources, and achievements to survive. To cope, the entrepreneurs recognised the limitations of their personal resources, such as time, energy, and effort, and adopted flexible approaches to financing, processes, procedures, and structures. This focus on protecting capabilities and resources also triggered refraining from seeking feedback. Entrepreneurs refrained from seeking feedback to pursue protection feedback-seeking goals. By refraining from seeking feedback to manage resources, maintain competitiveness, manage relationships, and maintain reputation, the entrepreneurs sustained current capabilities (e.g. novel ideas), resources (e.g. reputation), and relationships (e.g. with significant others) that protected the entrepreneur and/or the venture.

7.2.3. Venture emergence paradox

My analysis revealed that thriving and coping posed contradictory demands that could be best described as a paradox of performing (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) because thriving and coping motivated entrepreneurs to perform inconsistent actions (see Chapter Two). Thriving and coping co-existed *persistently* posing *contradictory and competing demands* on the entrepreneurs, yet these demands were also *interrelated,* thus aligning with the definition of paradox (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Thriving focused on developing new or enhanced capabilities and resources to establish the foundations of a self-sustaining venture that would excel, regardless of the involvement of the initial entrepreneur. Coping focused on maintaining existing capabilities and resources and protecting what had already been achieved to survive as an entity; simply to continue to exist considering the limitations of the

entrepreneur. To thrive, the entrepreneurs established formal revenue streams, processes, procedures, and structures, while they maintained minimal, flexible and adaptable financing, processes, procedures, and structures to cope. These activities were not only conflicting and requiring incompatible actions, but they also competed for the limited resources the entrepreneurs had, such as time, energy, effort, and attention. Yet, thriving and coping were also interrelated. Without the survival of the venture there would be no opportunities to develop new or enhanced capabilities and resources, and without developing new capabilities and resources in the past there would be nothing to maintain and protect. Two episodes from Daniel H.'s experience exemplified the contradictory yet interrelated relationship between thriving and coping. Describing the daily pressure of survival in the short term, he reflected on the lack of thriving efforts:

> We'll always have to negotiate and secure funding and contracts with public and third sector organisations, but we'd like to try and get some longer term ones and we'd like to build that enterprising part of the recruitment agency as well and I feel that if I can get a couple of medium- or long-term funding opportunities or government contracts in place – because everything's short term at the minute – and I can get a steady income from the recruitment agency, I can employ someone effectively to do 90% of what my operational job is and that way I feel the pressure from me, if you like, is relieved in that somebody else can take the daily pressure of it, we've got a medium-term future and I can then focus on the longer term stuff and bringing things in then and I don't feel like there's this kind of imminent feeling of "I must do it now otherwise the whole thing's going to collapse."

Yet, when he concentrated on a thriving, surviving from November to March of the following year became a challenge:

> I mean we've been working really, really hard to shore up the next financial year, if you like – so April onwards – and we've managed to get to a place where we're actually ahead of the next two years from April. We've got our core costs for the place which is fantastic because until then I'd been working on "Right, I can pay for the next three months our core costs. We've got to get something in." […] but what that has meant is that in the kind of fury to do that and get there I've taken my eye off the ball a bit in these last few months and it's been really

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challenging figuring out how we're going to get from now to March.

7.3. Ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence

As my analysis suggested that venture emergence triggered feedback seeking, I started to investigate how feedback seeking influenced venture emergence. While studying the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence was beyond the scope of my initial research, this new research question was prompted by the focus of the grounded theory approach to integrate emergent dimensions from the data into a theoretical model that explicates the relationships between these dimensions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As described in detail in Chapter Three, Section 3.5.4, I used a polar sampling strategy and focused the final stage of my analysis on the most and least successful entrepreneurs in the sample in terms of venture emergence based on four criteria (i.e. venture survival, operational status, innovation, and growth) to crystalise and draw insights about the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence. Peter, Andrew, Daniel H., and Angela J. were the only entrepreneurs in the sample whose paired ventures survived and achieved operational status, had average or higher innovation scores, and employed at least one new person within 12 months. At the opposite end of the continuum were Tim, Roger, Yvette, and Sadie whose ventures were disbanded or became dormant. The next two paragraphs briefly introduce the eight entrepreneurs and a summary is presented in Table 7.4, which is a reproduction of Table 3.4 for ease of reading.

The most successful entrepreneurs in the sample, in relation to their paired ventures, were Peter, Andrew, Daniel H., and Angela J. Peter had a problem gambling consultancy, which worked with large corporations, professional sports teams, and sports academies. Andrew's venture aimed to create a platform for youth entrepreneurship through events, education programmes, and digital

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TABLE 7.4. SUB-SAMPLE OF MOST AND LEAST SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS (REPRODUCTION OF TABLE 3.4)

Entrepreneur	Industry	Venture age[1]	Development stage at T1	Development stage at T2[2]	Staff at T1	Staff at T2	Innovation index
Peter (WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy)	Health, social and community services Business-related services	19	Ready to sell	Operational	0	4	4
Andrew (Youth Entrepreneurs)	Employment services	22	Prototype	Operational	2	8	5
Daniel H. (Local Works)	Employment services	9	In development	Operational	1	9	3
Angela J. (Able Waves)	Employment services Business-related services	36	Already sell	Operational	0	1	4
Tim (eCare)	Health, social and community services	35	Prototype	Closed	0	N/A	0
Roger (Able Generation)	Employment services	8	Prototype	Dormant	0	N/A	0
Yvette (Education for Today)	Education	168	In development	Dormant	0	N/A	0
Sadie (Active Strength)	Health, social and community services	12	Already sell	Closed	0	N/A	0

[1] Number of months since first firm-founding activity.

[2] 12 months after T1.

tools. Daniel H. aimed to reduce the barriers to the labour market for everyone though a one-stop shop for career support, training, development, and recruitment. Finally, Angela J. aimed to reduce the barriers to labour markets for socially excluded individuals, particularly those with disabilities, but also homeless individuals or immigrants, through training and self-help tools for both individuals and organisations. All four ventures became operational within 12 months, albeit they were in different development stages when interviewed initially. They all hired at least one new employee and had average or higher innovation scores of introducing incremental

and radical innovations in terms of new products, services, and processes.

The least successful entrepreneurs in the sample, in relation to their paired ventures, were Tim, Roger, Yvette, and Sadie. Tim's venture aimed to create a better experience for elderly people in care homes, their families, and activity coordinators with an enterprise iPad application. Roger's venture aimed to provide employment training and opportunities for at-risk youth. Yvette's venture aimed to change the education system to focus on developing pupils' creativity, problem-solving, and research skills. Sadie's venture aimed to create fitness and wellbeing opportunities for marginalised communities, mainly focusing on girls and women from minority backgrounds. In 2014, both Tim and Sadie closed down their ventures, while Roger's and Yvette's ventures became dormant with no clear indication of when or if they would resume business activities. Before closing or becoming dormant, neither one of the ventures had become operational or hired employees. Before becoming dormant, Roger did not conduct a sale, while Tim and Yvette had only one customer. Sadie had started trading, however, the revenues were not enough to cover expenses. Before she closed down the venture, she attempted to change her business model.

To draw insights about how feedback seeking related to venture emergence, I engaged with the data from the eight most and least successful entrepreneurs to compare and differentiate their overall feedback-seeking goals and strategies. My analysis indicated that feedback-seeking paradoxical tensions were persistent. Comparing the specific feedback-seeking strategies that the most and least successful entrepreneurs engaged in, such as searching for new sources or establishing feedback relationships, did not reveal any single feedback-seeking strategy to differentiate the two groups of entrepreneurs, which was in line with previous paradox research (e.g. Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010; Gotsi et al., 2010; Smith, 2014).

Next, I engaged with the entrepreneurs' discourse to compare all feedback-seeking elements, that is both goals and strategies, at an aggregated level. Instead of engaging with specific feedback-

seeking interactions with their respective goals and strategies as a unit of analysis, I analysed which goals entrepreneurs pursued overall and which strategies they used across all feedback-seeking interactions they had revealed. Analysing entrepreneurs' overall feedback seeking revealed two insights. First, the most successful entrepreneurs engaged in both seeking and not seeking feedback. Second, what enabled the most successful entrepreneurs to both seek and not seek feedback were (1) consideration and pursuit of multiple feedback-seeking goals and (2) a wide repertoire of feedback-seeking strategies and switching between and combining them. I labelled the second enabler "behavioural complexity" in line with previous research investigating wide repertoires or roles or actions (Denison, Hooijberg & Quinn, 1995; Hoojberg, Hunt & Dodge, 1997; Lawrence, Lenk & Quinn, 2009). To maintain consistency and relatedness between these two enablers, I labelled the first one "goal-setting complexity".

7.3.1. Feedback-seeking enablers

I detail goal-setting and behavioural complexities, as well as how they develop, next following the data structure for the *feedback-seeking enablers* aggregated dimension (See Table 7.5).

7.3.1.1. Goal-setting complexity

The first enabler that differentiated the most from the least successful entrepreneurs was feedback-seeking goal-setting complexity. I define *goal-setting complexity as the ability to consider and pursue a wide variety of development and protection feedback-seeking goals.* This meant demonstration of sensitivity toward the different goals that could be achieved with seeking feedback or refraining from it. Even when the most successful entrepreneurs focused on only one development or protection goal at a given time, goal-setting complexity involved the consideration of how the other goals could be affected by the act of seeking feedback or refraining

TABLE 7.5. DATA STRUCTURE FOR AGGREGATED DIMENSION: FEEDBACK-SEEKING ENABLERS

First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimension
Considering diverse feedback-seeking goals	Goal-setting complexity	Feedback-seeking enablers
Recognising tensions between feedback-seeking goals		
Pursuing diverse feedback-seeking goals		
Considering diverse feedback-seeking strategies	Behavioural complexity	
Enacting diverse feedback-seeking strategies		
Switching between diverse feedback-seeking strategies		
Developing new feedback-seeking goals	Developing enablers	
Developing new feedback-seeking strategies		
Improving feedback-seeking strategies		

from it, thus surfacing tensions between goals. Goal-setting complexity influenced seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback to achieve multiple and different goals over time, instead of focusing on only one goal. As my analysis revealed four development and four protection feedback-seeking goals, eight in total (see Chapters Four and Five), I could differentiate between low and high goal-setting complexity based on using four goals (half of total identified) as the cut-off point. I operationalised low goal-setting complexity as consideration and pursuit of four or fewer development and/or protection goals and high goal-setting complexity as consideration and pursuit of more than four development and protection goals.

My analysis revealed that low goal-setting complexity was common among the least successful entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs who closed their ventures or became dormant exhibited low goal-setting complexity because their discourse revealed consideration and pursuit of few development and protection goals overall. For example, their discourse revealed that they rarely pursued learning, response uncertainty reduction, and

competitiveness maintenance feedback-seeking goals (see Table 7.6.). Low goal-setting complexity did not necessarily mean that these entrepreneurs pursued more protection than development goals, or vice versa, instead they were less aware of how both seeking and not seeking feedback could be beneficial for themselves and their ventures for different purposes, such as learning, reputation building, and maintaining competitiveness. Overall, the least successful entrepreneurs sought feedback or refrained from it to pursue few goals.

My analysis revealed that high goal-setting complexity was common among the most successful entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs whose ventures successfully emerged as operational, innovative, and growing demonstrated high goal-setting complexity because they considered and pursued many development and protection goals overall. For example, over a number of different feedback-seeking interactions, Angela J. was concerned with or pursued all eight development and protection goals. Andrew demonstrated a similar high level of goal-setting complexity and over time the only goal that was not part of his discourse was relationship management (see Table 7.6.). High goal-setting complexity did not refer to a balance between the number of development and protection goals, instead it meant that the entrepreneurs considered how both seeking and not seeking feedback could be beneficial for themselves and their ventures for different purposes. The entrepreneurs with high goal-setting complexity recognised the different ways feedback seeking could help and hinder venture emergence. Overall, the most successful entrepreneurs sought feedback or refrained from it to pursue many goals.

Based on my analysis, I inferred that goal-setting complexity aided venture emergence by enabling diversity of feedback seeking in terms of purpose. On the one hand, goal-setting complexity surfaced tensions between development and protection goals. Entrepreneurs with high goal-setting complexity considered the multiple roles and influences feedback seeking had on both the individual and his/her venture. They appreciated that feedback

TABLE 7.6. GOAL-SETTING COMPLEXITY COMPARISON BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneur	Goals considered or pursued overall	Goal-setting complexity level (number of goals overall)	Venture emergence
Peter	Reducing response uncertainty (D)[1] Learning (D) Improving (D) Managing resources (P)[2] Maintaining competitiveness (P)	High (5)	Successful
Andrew	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Learning (D) Improving (D) Building reputation (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining competitiveness (P) Maintaining reputation (P)	High (7)	Successful
Daniel H.	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Learning (D) Improving (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining competitiveness (P) Maintaining reputation (P)	High (6)	Successful
Angela J.	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Learning (D) Improving (D) Building reputation (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining competitiveness (P) Managing relationships (P) Maintaining reputation (P)	High (8)	Successful
Tim	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Improving (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining competitiveness (P)	Low (4)	Unsuccessful
Roger	Improving (D) Building reputation (D) Managing relationships (P) Managing reputation (P)	Low (4)	Unsuccessful
Yvette	Improving (D) Managing resources (P) Managing relationships (P)	Low (3)	Unsuccessful
Sadie	Building reputation (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining reputation (P)	Low (3)	Unsuccessful

[1] "D" stands for development feedback-seeking goal.

[2] "P" stands for protection feedback-seeking goal.

seeking could both help and harm the entrepreneur and the venture, thus experiencing many tensions. Entrepreneurs with low goal-setting complexity focused on a small number of roles and influences of feedback seeking on both the individual and his/her venture, which

limited the conflicting and competing tensions between development and protection goals. High goal-setting complexity influenced diversity of feedback seeking to pursue more benefits and avoid negative outcomes compared to the pursuit of fewer feedback-seeking goals. On the other hand, goal-setting complexity enhanced entrepreneurs' awareness of the paradoxical tensions between development and protection goals. Entrepreneurs were motivated to both seek and not to seek feedback as both actions were beneficial. Goal-setting complexity was essential in coping with this paradox because it enabled entrepreneurs to recognise the tensions in the first place to then enact different strategies that leveraged trade-offs and synergies to maximise the benefits of feedback seeking, or refraining from it. Using different strategies to manage feedback-seeking tensions would be impossible without the awareness that feedback seeking could be both beneficial and harmful for entrepreneurs and their ventures. This related to the second enabler that differentiated the most and least successful entrepreneurs: behavioural complexity.

7.3.1.2 Behavioural complexity

The second enabler that differentiated the most from the least successful entrepreneurs was feedback-seeking behavioural complexity. Consistent with the broader behavioural complexity literature (e.g. Denison et al., 1995), *feedback-seeking behavioural complexity is defined as the ability to consider and engage in a wide repertoire of differentiation and integration feedback-seeking strategies.* This meant considering, enacting, and switching between a large number of both differentiation and integration strategies overall, instead of prioritising only one type of strategies, thus engaging in the full range of the feedback-seeking behaviour. As my analysis revealed five differentiation and three integration feedback-seeking strategies, eight in total (see Chapter Six), I could differentiate between low and high behavioural complexity based on using four strategies (half of total identified) as the cut-off point. I

operationalised low behavioural complexity as the enactment or consideration of four or fewer differentiation and/or integration strategies and high behavioural complexity as the enactment or consideration of five or more differentiation and integration strategies.

My analysis revealed that low behavioural complexity was common among the least successful entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs who closed their ventures or became dormant exhibited low behavioural complexity because their discourse included consideration or enactment of only a small number of differentiation and integration strategies. Additionally, some of the least successful entrepreneurs focused only on differentiation strategies instead of combining integration and differentiation (see Table 7.7). Thus low behavioural complexity could involve not only a small number of overall strategies, but also a prioritisation of one type of strategies. This suggested that differentiation and integration strategies helped entrepreneurs to manage the feedback-seeking paradox in different ways and benefit from feedback seeking in different ways.

My analysis revealed that high behavioural complexity was common among the most successful entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs who successfully engaged in the venture emergence process demonstrated high behavioural complexity because their discourse included consideration or enactment of many feedback-seeking strategies across both differentiation and integration. Unlike some of the least successful entrepreneurs, all of the most successful entrepreneurs enacted multiple differentiation and integration strategies (see Table 7.7). High behavioural complexity did not necessarily refer to finding the perfect balance between all strategies. Instead it enabled the entrepreneurs to consider multiple options and select from different feedback-seeking strategies, based on their needs in relation to development and protection goals for themselves and their ventures. Developing rich behavioural repertoires equipped the entrepreneurs not only to recognise the paradoxical tensions embedded in feedback seeking, but, more importantly, with the tools to respond to this paradox.

TABLE 7.7. BEHAVIOURAL COMPLEXITY COMPARISON BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneur	Strategies considered or enacted overall	Behavioural complexity level (number of strategies overall)	Venture emergence
Peter	Segmentation (Di)[1] Searching (Di) Framing (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I)[2] Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	High (5)	Successful
Andrew	Temporal avoidance (Di) Source avoidance (Di) Searching (Di) Framing (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	High (6)	Successful
Daniel H.	Temporal avoidance (Di) Segmenting (Di) Searching (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	High (5)	Successful
Angela J.	Source avoidance (Di) Segmenting (Di) Searching (Di) Framing (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I) Creating feedback channels (I)	High (7)	Successful
Tim	Source avoidance (Di) Segmenting (Di) Searching (Di)	Low (3)	Unsuccessful
Roger	Source avoidance (Di) Searching (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	Low (4)	Unsuccessful
Yvette	Temporal avoidance (Di) Source avoidance (Di) Segmenting (Di)	Low (3)	Unsuccessful
Sadie	Source avoidance (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	Low (3)	Unsuccessful

[1] "Di" stands for differentiation strategy.

[2] "I" stands for integration strategy.

Based on my analysis, I inferred that behavioural complexity aided venture emergence by enabling diversity of feedback seeking in terms of strategies. Feedback-seeking behavioural complexity aided venture emergence because it allowed entrepreneurs to draw on a rich repertoire of strategies to manage the feedback-seeking

paradox between development and protection goals. My analysis suggested that, while goal-setting complexity helped entrepreneurs to consider that feedback seeking could be both beneficial and harmful for entrepreneurs and their ventures, behavioural complexity helped entrepreneurs to translate this awareness to behaviours and enact appropriate strategies to benefit and protect the entrepreneur and/or the venture. Therefore, I conceptualised behavioural complexity as a consequence of goal-setting complexity. Behavioural complexity allowed entrepreneurs to seek feedback not as an "either/ or" method of approaching or avoiding feedback seeking, but to engage in a "both/and" approach of seeking and not seeking feedback in different situations through a variety of strategies. Instead of using the same strategies over and over again, entrepreneurs with high behavioural complexity could translate goal-setting complexity into new actions to benefit themselves and their ventures. This link between behavioural complexity as an enactment of goal-setting complexity was supported by additional analyses I performed as robustness checks. These analyses are described next.

7.3.1.3. Robustness checks

My primary analysis and robustness checks suggested that both goal-setting and behavioural complexities were necessary feedback-seeking enablers. My primary analysis revealed that the most successful entrepreneurs in this study all exhibited high goal-setting and behavioural complexities, while the least successful entrepreneurs all exhibited low goal-setting and behavioural complexities. To check the plausibility and trustworthiness of the insights and conclusions drawn from my primary data analysis, I performed two robustness checks. For the first robustness check I analysed the aggregated goals and strategies from the discourse of two additional entrepreneurs, who were the only ones in the sample, apart from the four most successful entrepreneurs, who demonstrated high goal-setting and behavioural complexities. For the second robustness check I examined the aggregated goals and

strategies from the discourse of all remaining 27 entrepreneurs to identify others who demonstrated either high goal-setting or behavioural complexities and compare their progress toward venture emergence to the most and least successful entrepreneurs.

First, a robustness check with the data from two additional entrepreneurs supported the proposition that both goal-setting and behavioural complexities enabled feedback seeking. Apart from the four most successful entrepreneurs (Peter, Andrew, Daniel H., and Angela J.), the two other entrepreneurs who demonstrated high goal-setting and behavioural complexities were Brandon and Lisa (see Table 7.8.). Brandon aimed to provide flexible employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities, while Lisa's venture was focused on reducing negative environmental impact through promoting cycling and healthy local diet. The analysis of their discourse revealed that they both considered and pursued a high number of development and protection goals through a combination of differentiation and integration strategies. However, judging the relationship with venture emergence was not straightforward, especially in the case of Lisa. Brandon met three of the criteria for inclusion in the sub-sample of the most successful entrepreneurs: 1.) surviving venture, 2.) an average innovation score based on introducing products, services, and processes new to his venture, and 3.) hiring nine new employees within 12 months (the highest number in the sample). However, his venture was not operational, which meant it did not have more than three consecutive months of positive cash flow. His venture was considered high growth by support organisations, accepted into an accelerator, and was expanding geographically to remote areas of Scotland. The fact that the venture was not operational by the end of data collection could, at least partially, be explained by the rapid growth of the venture as all revenues were immediately invested in recruiting more employees. Brendon's experience provided additional support that both goal-setting and behavioural complexities were necessary feedback-seeking enablers. Based on the data, I could not draw any insights from Lisa's experience as she left the venture, thus making it

TABLE 7.8. ROBUSTNESS CHECK: GOAL-SETTING AND BEHAVIOURAL COMPLEXITIES

Entrepreneur	Goals considered or pursued overall	Goal-setting complexity level (number of goals overall)	Strategies considered or enacted overall	Behavioural complexity level (number of strategies overall)	Venture emergence
Brandon	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Learning (D) Improving (D) Managing resources (P) Managing relationships (P)	High (5)	Temporal avoidance (Di) Segmenting (Di) Searching (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I)	High (5)	Successful
Lisa	Reducing response uncertainty (D) Learning (D) Improving (D) Managing resources (P) Maintaining competitiveness (P) Maintaining reputation (P)	High (6)	Temporal avoidance (Di) Source avoidance (Di) Establishing feedback relationships (I) Creating feedback-seeking routines (I) Creating feedback channels (I)	High (5)	Left the venture

impossible to link her feedback seeking with the performance of the venture.

Second, a robustness check with the data from the remaining 27 entrepreneurs supported the proposition that both goal-setting and behavioural complexities enabled feedback seeking. Further analysis of the data revealed that apart from Peter, Andrew, Daniel H., Angela J, Lisa, and Brandon, no other entrepreneurs exhibited high levels of both goal-setting and behavioural complexities. Analysing aggregated goals and strategies from the discourse of all entrepreneurs, I identified six entrepreneurs who demonstrated high goal-setting complexity (Dominic, Sam, Samantha, Selena, Angela N., and Josie H.). However, they did not exhibit high behavioural complexity and their progress toward venture emergence varied tremendously. For example, Samantha and Selena were still developing and testing prototypes while Dominic had just started

trading, and Josie H. was leading an operational venture with four new employees but only with a couple incremental innovations. Additionally, apart from the six entrepreneurs who exhibited high levels of both goal-setting and behavioural complexities, no entrepreneur demonstrated high behavioural complexity only.

In summary, the robustness checks provided additional support for the plausibility of the proposition that goal-setting and behavioural complexities together enabled effective feedback seeking toward venture emergence.

7.3.1.4. Dynamic development of enablers

My analysis suggested that feedback seeking had dynamic elements because feedback-seeking interactions shaped goal-setting and behavioural complexities (see feedback loops in Figure 3.2). The entrepreneurs' discourse revealed that why (or why not) they sought feedback from different individuals through different strategies was at least partially based on previous successful and unsuccessful feedback-seeking interactions. Such learning experiences developed new feedback-seeking goals and new or improved feedback-seeking strategies, which emerged as the first-order categories underpinning this second-order theme of "Developing enablers". This learning shaped entrepreneurs' understanding of how feedback seeking could be both beneficial and harmful for themselves and their ventures, thus influencing the development of goal-setting complexity. Learning experiences also shaped the specific strategies by which entrepreneurs sought feedback, thus influencing the development of behavioural complexity.

First, by seeking feedback entrepreneurs developed goal-setting complexity as they developed new goals they could pursue with seeking or refraining from seeking feedback. When they experienced unplanned positive outcomes of seeking feedback, they recognised they could engage in feedback seeking to achieve additional goals. For example, this happened when they sought feedback to reduce response uncertainty or improve their offerings and recognised that the act of seeking feedback could also build reputation. However,

when entrepreneurs experienced unexpected negative outcomes of seeking feedback, they started to recognise new protection goals. This was most strongly experienced with feedback sources appropriating entrepreneurs' ideas, thus motivating the entrepreneurs to maintain their competitiveness by refraining from seeking feedback. However, by seeking feedback entrepreneurs also learnt how the action could have a negative impact on their relationships with significant others or their competitiveness by slowing down progress. For example, Yvette summarised how she learnt not to seek feedback from her daughter to manage their relationship:

> And now I am much more fussy who I ask for feedback. I don't ask my daughter. Ever. Been there, done that. It was very painful and very unpleasant. She wants to fix it for me and she can only see fixing it her way. But she and I work from totally different perspectives. So I've learnt not to ask her because she is my daughter and I don't want to argue with her over this.

Second, by seeking feedback entrepreneurs developed behavioural complexity as they improved and developed new strategies. Based on the outcomes of their feedback-seeking interactions, entrepreneurs changed their feedback strategies and developed new ones. For example, this is how both Peter and Angela J. started to carefully frame their feedback requests because they were not receiving meaningful feedback. By learning from previous feedback-seeking interactions, entrepreneurs could identify, test, and build trust in specific feedback sources. This is how they learnt whom to seek or not to seek feedback from. When entrepreneurs considered feedback interactions to have a negative outcome, they became more reluctant to seek feedback from the same or similar feedback sources. For example, this is how many entrepreneurs started to engage in source avoidance with family members or potentially competing organisations. However, when entrepreneurs considered interactions to have a positive outcome, they started to build trust in the specific feedback sources involved in the interaction and sometimes formalised these feedback interactions with a transition from differentiation strategies to establishing feedback relationships as an integration strategy. For example, Andrew started

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to seek feedback with search and segmentation strategies and over a period of two years identified the key people he sought feedback from at specific instances and formalised these relationships by creating an advisory group with the feedback sources he trusted the most.

7.3.2. Ambidextrous feedback seeking

In summary, my analysis suggested that an overall "both/and" approach to proactively and deliberately seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback in pursuit of development and protection goals with different feedback-seeking strategies aided venture emergence. The entrepreneurs whose ventures successfully emerged appreciated how seeking feedback could be both beneficial and harmful for themselves and/or their ventures. Recognising the potential positive and negative outcomes of seeking feedback, these entrepreneurs engaged in a greater range of the feedback-seeking behaviour continuum (from not seeking feedback to seeking feedback) also developed a wide repertoire of differentiation and integration strategies to pursue both development and protection goals. Thus, actively engaging and coping with the feedback-seeking paradox aided venture emergence because it enabled entrepreneurs to leverage the power of both development and protection goals simultaneously, instead of choosing between development and protection goals.

I conceptualise this overall "both/and" approach to proactively seek feedback and to proactively refrain from seeking feedback as ambidextrous. In general, ambidexterity refers to individuals' ability to use both hands with equal ease. In the strategic management literature, the concept of ambidexterity broadly refers to an organisation's efforts to pursue two disparate things that create contradictory tensions at the same time (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Simsek, 2009). Although the concept is most commonly used to refer to engagement in both exploration and exploitation (Simsek, 2009), it can also capture organisations' engagement in other contradictory and seemingly mutually exclusive demands and activities, such as

manufacturing efficiency and flexibility, differentiation and low-cost strategic positioning, or global integration and local responsiveness (Gibson & BIrkinshaw, 2004). While previous research has primarily applied the notion of ambidexterity to organisations, I extend the concept to entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. *I define ambidextrous feedback seeking as entrepreneurs' efforts to pursue contradictory feedback-seeking goals through both proactively seeking feedback and proactively refraining from seeking feedback using diverse strategies.*

7.4. Chapter summary and discussion

In this final findings chapter I presented venture emergence as a paradox of performing, which promoted and inhibited feedback seeking, and investigated how feedback seeking influenced venture emergence. Therefore, this last empirical chapter addressed the third research question that emerged from the research process: *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?* My analysis revealed that entrepreneurs aimed to build thriving ventures, which required creating new or enhanced capabilities and resources and triggered development feedback-seeking goals. However, they also confronted the necessities and challenges of daily life as individuals and entrepreneurs who aimed to protect what had been achieved so far, which triggered protection feedback-seeking goals. Based on my analysis, I proposed that ambidextrous feedback seeking, which involves proactively seeking feedback and proactively refraining from seeking feedback using diverse strategies, aids venture emergence. Goal-setting and behavioural complexities enabled this overall ambidextrous approach to feedback seeking. The findings presented in this final empirical chapter advance our understanding of the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence.

By introducing the concept of ambidextrous feedback seeking my findings complicate our understanding of the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence. My findings build on

previous research, which focuses on the quantity of feedback seeking (Frese, 2007; 2009; Katre & Salipante, 2012), by proposing that the diversity of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is also important for performance. Given the conflicting and competing tensions between development and protection goals and the complexities associated with these paradoxical tensions, simply considering the frequency of feedback seeking may not be enough to understand how feedback seeking relates to venture emergence. Indeed, my findings revealed that entrepreneurs expected severe negative outcomes from seeking feedback (e.g. losing competitiveness) and those who successfully created operational, innovative, and growing ventures proactively avoided seeking feedback for specific periods of time and from specific individuals or groups of individuals. Instead, an overall ambidextrous feedback-seeking approach that embeds proactively seeking feedback and proactively refraining from seeking feedback using diverse strategies is proposed to aid venture emergence. Such an ambidextrous approach leverages the power of both development and protection goals simultaneously, thus maximising the benefits and minimising the drawbacks of feedback seeking. Therefore, successful entrepreneurs may not necessarily seek more feedback, but they seem to adopt a more sophisticated ambidextrous approach of feedback seeking.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION.

8.1. Introduction

Building on the presentation of the data, this chapter integrates the findings into an emergent model (see Figure 8.1) and discusses the insights this model provides into the study's research questions and directions for future research in three main scholarly domains: entrepreneurship, organisational behaviour, and paradox theory. The discussion begins with an examination of the emergent model in relation to the research questions for the study: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback?, How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?*, and *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?* Next, I elaborate on the contributions of this study for future research in entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour, as well as how the study enhances paradox as a metatheory. Then I discuss the implications of this research for entrepreneurs and support organisations. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of the research and how they can be addressed in the future, thus providing a bridge to follow-up studies from this dissertation project.

8.2. Addressing the research questions

The previous four chapters detailed the themes that emerged from my analysis of the experiences of 37 nascent social entrepreneurs. Building on these findings, I now present an emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence (illustrated in Figure 8.1) to provide insights into the study's research questions. I start with a discussion of the key concepts and relationships in the emergent model. Next, I use these concepts and relationships to address my research questions.

8.2.1. Dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence

Based on my inductive analysis, I propose a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking that explicates the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, an overall ambidextrous approach, and consequences of feedback seeking (see Figure 8.1). Thus, the theoretical output of this inductive study is a process model of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking as an iterative sequence that influences venture emergence as a proximate outcome (McMullen & Dimov, 2013). Overall, the model recognises that entrepreneurs address self-, venture-, and other-oriented concerns when seeking feedback. It proposes that ambidextrous feedback seeking through different strategies that leverage both short-term trade-offs and long-term synergies between development and protection goals across multiple interactions aids venture emergence.

A venture emergence paradox triggers entrepreneurs' feedback seeking because it poses persistent, yet interrelated tensions within the venture as well as between the venture and the entrepreneur's personal life (see Figure 8.1., Venture Emergence Paradox). Responding to the venture emergence paradox, development goals drive feedback seeking to reduce response uncertainty, learn, improve offerings and their positioning, and build reputation. However, also in response to the venture emergence paradox, protection goals drive refraining from seeking feedback to manage resources, maintain competitiveness, manage relationships, and maintain reputation (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Venture Emergence Paradox to Feedback-seeking Paradox). These incompatible actions to seek and not to seek feedback pose persistently contradictory, yet interrelated, demands on entrepreneurs, which can be best described as a paradox (see Figure 8.1., Feedback-seeking Paradox). Entrepreneurs engage with the contradictory feedback-seeking goals (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Feedback-seeking Paradox to Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking) by adopting an

FIGURE 8.1. EMERGENT DYNAMIC MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURS' AMBIDEXTROUS FEEDBACK SEEKING FOR VENTURE EMERGENCE (REPRODUCTION OF FIGURE 3.2)
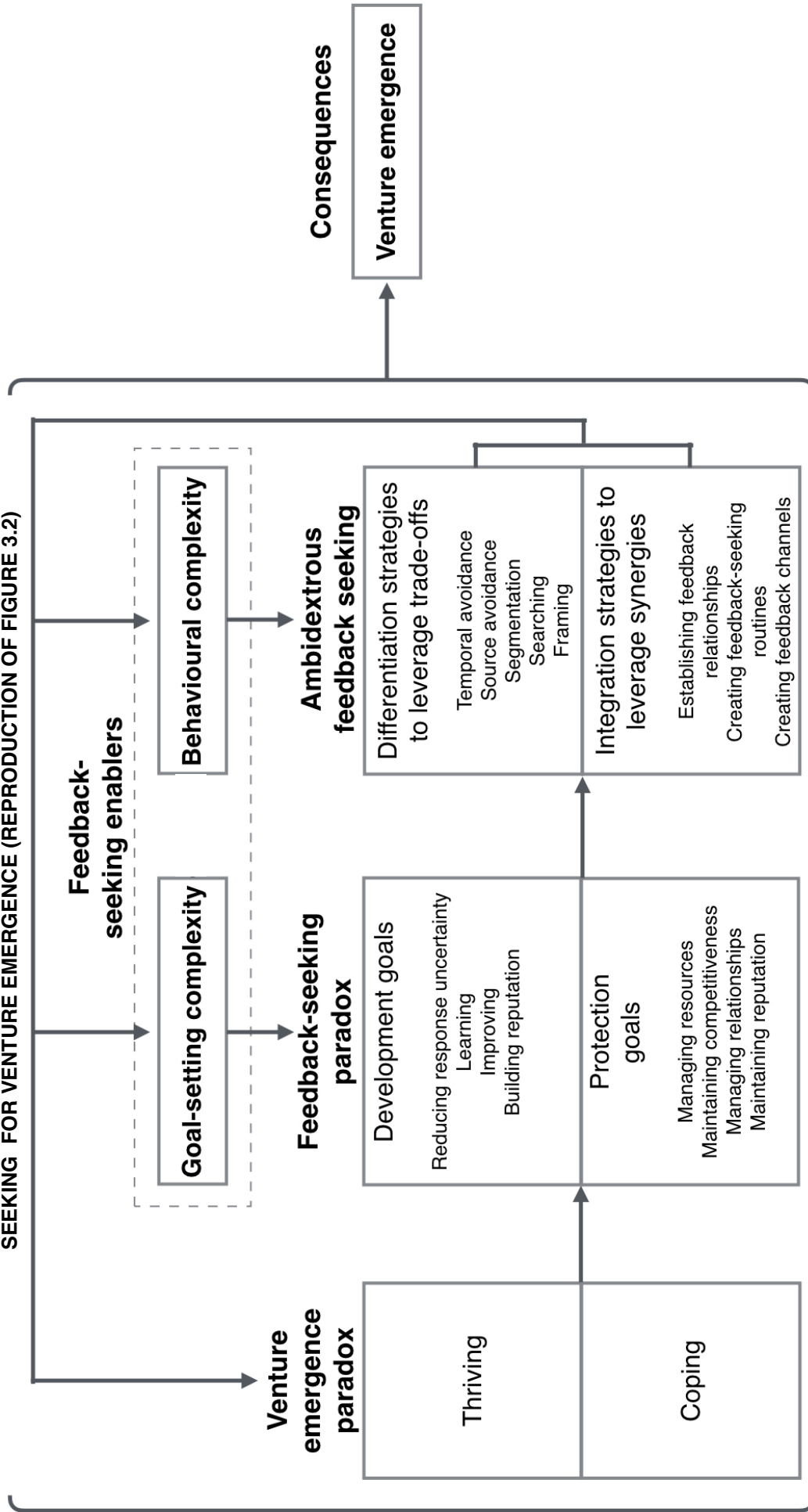
ambidextrous pattern of seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback, which differentiates goals across time, sources, and/or content or integrates them through novel solutions (see Figure 8.1., Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking). Goal-setting and behavioural complexities enable entrepreneurs to manage the feedback-seeking paradox by surfacing tensions and conflicts between goals (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Goal-setting Complexity to Feedback-Seeking Paradox) and engaging entrepreneurs in a wide repertoire of differentiation and integration feedback-seeking strategies (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Behavioural Complexity to Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking).

As alluded to in Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.1.4., feedback seeking is a dynamic process. First, each feedback-seeking interaction fuels the process all over again. Feedback seeking is triggered by a venture emergence paradox that embeds thriving and coping as persistently contradictory yet interrelated elements. To a different degree each feedback-seeking interaction aids thriving or coping, which also highlights the need for the other (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking to Venture Emergence Paradox). Second, feedback-seeking interactions aid entrepreneurs to develop and enhance goal-setting complexity. As entrepreneurs seek feedback and encounter unexpected positive or negative outcomes from specific interactions, they develop new goals they can pursue with seeking feedback or refraining from seeking feedback (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking to Goal-setting Complexity). Third, feedback-seeking interactions aid entrepreneurs to develop and enhance behavioural complexity. As entrepreneurs seek feedback and learn from each interaction, they improve and develop new feedback-seeking strategies. By learning from previous feedback-seeking interactions, entrepreneurs can identify, test, and build trust in specific feedback sources, thus changing how they decide whom to ask for feedback. As entrepreneurs build trust in specific feedback sources through multiple interactions, they can transition from using differentiation strategies with these individuals to establish feedback relationships

and create feedback-seeking routines as integration strategies (see Figure 8.1., arrow from Ambidextrous Feedback Seeking to Behavioural Complexity). Thus, each feedback-seeking interaction fuels and influences future feedback-seeking interactions.

Ambidextrous feedback seeking, which is entrepreneurs' efforts to pursue contradictory feedback-seeking goals through both seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback using diverse strategies, aids venture emergence. Venture emergence triggers the feedback-seeking process through development and protection goals that simultaneously motivate entrepreneurs to seek and not to seek feedback. When entrepreneurs prioritise few feedback-seeking goals and pursue them with limited strategies, they create vicious cycles that hinder venture emergence. However, when entrepreneurs engage in ambidextrous feedback seeking and pursue diverse feedback-seeking goals with diverse strategies, including refraining from seeking feedback, they create virtuous cycles that contribute to venture emergence. Ambidextrous feedback seeking aids venture emergence because entrepreneurs leverage the power of both development and protection goals simultaneously instead of choosing between them (see Figure 8.1., arrow from feedback seeking process to Venture Emergence). This enables entrepreneurs to cope with the necessities and challenges of daily life as entrepreneurs and individuals, while building capabilities and resources for the venture to thrive. The critical insight about entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is that an effective approach toward venture emergence does not involve avoiding or approaching feedback seeking, but ambidextrous involvement of both through different strategies. Therefore, this grounded theory model suggests that the frequency of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking may not be sufficient for venture emergence, but an ambidextrous approach that pursues multiple goals by combining and switching between multiple strategies is also required.

The above description of the emergent model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence presents the feedback-seeking phenomenon as a dynamic process embedding

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triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, enablers, an overall ambidextrous pattern, and consequences of this ambidextrous feedback seeking pattern. While formal propositions are not mandatory to explain the complex and dynamic phenomena uncovered by studies consistent with a grounded theory approach (Gioia et al., 2012) nor to explain the events and outcomes of process theories (Cornelissen, 2016; Delbridge & Fiss, 2013), in addition to the narrative theorising style employed so far (Cornelissen, 2016), I introduce six broad propositions. The following six broad propositions highlight the most important concepts and summarise the core relationships of the proposed dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence:

Proposition 1: In the context of venture emergence, entrepreneurs proactively seek feedback to pursue development goals: reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings, and building reputation.

Proposition 2: In the context of venture emergence, entrepreneurs proactively refrain from seeking feedback to pursue protection goals: managing resources, maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships, and maintaining reputation.

Proposition 3: Entrepreneurs manage the paradoxical tensions between development and protection feedback-seeking goals with the use of specific integration or differentiation feedback-seeking strategies.

Proposition 4: A pattern of ambidextrous feedback seeking, which is entrepreneurs' efforts to pursue contradictory and diverse development and protection feedback-seeking goals through diverse strategies, aids venture emergence.

Proposition 5: Goal-setting and behavioural complexities are enablers of ambidextrous feedback seeking.

Proposition 6: Goal-setting and behavioural complexities can be developed over time through learning from specific feedback-seeking interactions.

8.2.2. Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback?

Part of the first research question that guided this doctoral thesis was: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback?*. In addressing this research question, my findings uncover the underlying reasons behind feedback seeking's value and benefits in diverse processes, such as innovation (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015) and fast strategic decision making (Eisenhardt, 1989). The emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence proposes that entrepreneurs seek feedback because they pursue development goals, which are desired end-states of new or enhanced capabilities and resources. Entrepreneurs seek feedback to pursue four development goals: *reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building reputation.* Seeking feedback enhances existing or develops new individual or venture capabilities (e.g. entrepreneurs' skills and approaches) and resources (e.g. reputation). A summary of these goals can be seen in Table 8.1, which is a reproduction of Table 4.2 for ease of reading.

Part of the first research question that guided this doctoral thesis was: *Why do entrepreneurs refrain from seeking feedback?.* In addressing this research question, my findings uncover the potential negative outcomes that entrepreneurs expect from seeking feedback, which have been ignored so far, and provide novel insights into the puzzling finding that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre & Salipante, 2012), given the expected benefits. The emergent

dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for

venture emergence proposes that entrepreneurs refrain from seeking

TABLE 8.1. DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS COMPARISON (REPRODUCTION OF TABLE 4.2)

	Motivation to seek feedback	Type of feedback	Topic of feedback	Sources of feedback
Response uncertainty reduction goal	To minimise feelings of doubt, confusion and insecurity by confirming decisions, selecting between options, and generating new alternatives	Outcome feedback to confirm or select ideas, decisions, approaches Cognitive feedback to develop new alternatives	Strategic decisions: market, monetisation, and offering design Management and operations: legal structure Personal style: full-time commitment	Customers Beneficiaries Professionals and experts Social entrepreneurs
Learning goal	To acquire or alter knowledge, skills and habits to launch and manage the venture	Cognitive feedback to guide future performance	Strategic decisions: monetisation and processes of product/services design, development, and delivery Management and operations: financial management, health, safety and HR policies and procedures, and marketing, sales, PR and branding Personal style: abilities, skills, approaches, and lifestyle	Social entrepreneurs Commercial entrepreneurs Mentors
Improvement goal	To create better products and services or to position them more effectively on the market by correcting errors or enhancing their appeal or performance	Outcome feedback to assess current state of products or services or their positioning Cognitive feedback to guide future improvement of products or services or their positioning	Strategic decisions: products and services Management and operations: marketing, sales, PR and branding	Beneficiaries Customers Employees and volunteers (as representatives of the beneficiaries) Professionals and experts Social entrepreneurs Commercial entrepreneurs

Reputation building goal	To construct a positive image in front of stakeholders	Both outcome and cognitive feedback are sought, but reputation is mostly created by the perceived meaning of the act	Strategic decisions: products and services Management and operations: decisions	Beneficiaries Customers Employees Volunteers

TABLE 8.2. PROTECTION FEEDBACK-SEEKING GOALS COMPARISON (REPRODUCTION OF TABLE 5.2)

	Motivation not to seek feedback	**Less likely topics of feedback**	**Less likely sources of feedback**
Resource management goal	To conserve personal and venture resources for activities other than feedback seeking	Feedback seeking on any topic can compete for resources with other activities	Managing resources can be a goal for any feedback-seeking interaction. Particularly difficult feedback sources are: Family members, Friends, and Beneficiaries due to perceived lack of honesty Professionals and experts, and Social entrepreneurs due to perceived lack of proximity or lack of appropriate social networks
Competitiveness maintenance goal	To sustain a position for effective performance in the marketplace in terms of gaining customers and beneficiaries	Strategic decisions: offering design to protect ideas Feedback seeking on any topic can slow down progress	Social entrepreneurs, Not-for-profit leaders and employees, and Potential customers to protect ideas Everyone to prevent slow progress
Relationship management goal	To prevent tensions and negative experiences with personally significant or venture-relevant others	Feedback seeking on any topic can have a negative influence on relationships	Family members Friends (Potential) customers (Potential) beneficiaries
Reputation management goal	To sustain a positive public image amongst stakeholders and personally significant others	Feedback seeking on any topic can have a negative influence on reputation	Customers Investors and funders Employees Beneficiaries Family members and friends

feedback because they pursue protection goals, which are desired end-states of maintained current individual and venture capabilities, resources, and relationships. Entrepreneurs refrain from seeking

feedback to pursue four protection goals: *managing resources, maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships, and maintaining reputation*. They refrain from seeking feedback to protect themselves and/or their ventures by maintaining capabilities (e.g. speed), resources (e.g. reputation), and relationships (with personally significant or venture-relevant others). A summary of these goals can be seen in Table 8.2, which is a reproduction of Table 5.1 for ease of reading.

8.2.3. How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?

The second research question that guided this doctoral thesis was: *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?*. In addressing this research question, my findings uncover specific short- and long-term feedback-seeking strategies that explicate how entrepreneurs actually seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback, as well as an overall ambidextrous feedback-seeking approach, which offers a new theoretical lens on this entrepreneurial action and conceptualises feedback seeking as a "both/and" instead of an "either/or" phenomenon.

First, my findings suggest that entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback with specific feedback-seeking strategies. They use short-term *differentiation strategies* that separate development and protection goals across time, sources, and/or content to prioritise different goals and leverage trade-offs between them. Entrepreneurs use three differentiation strategies to seek feedback: *segmentation of sources, searching for new sources,* and *framing feedback requests*. Entrepreneurs use two differentiation strategies to refrain from seeking feedback: *temporal avoidance* and *source avoidance*. Differentiation feedback-seeking strategies are guided by ongoing decisions made for each feedback-seeking interaction. Entrepreneurs also seek feedback with three long-term *integration strategies* that combine development and protection goals in novel ways to leverage synergies between them. These integration strategies are: *establishing feedback relationships, creating*

feedback-seeking routines, and *creating feedback channels.* Explicating the specific strategies by which entrepreneurs seek and refrain from seeking feedback adds to the scarce insights that vaguely portray entrepreneurs as either seeking feedback through face-to-face interactions (Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015), blog posts or other technology-mediated communication (Fisher, 2012; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015), or not seeking feedback at all (Katre & Salipante, 2012).

Second, my findings suggest that effective feedback seeking is ambidextrous in nature. The emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' *ambidextrous feedback seeking* for venture emergence conceptualises feedback seeking as a "both/and" phenomenon whereby entrepreneurs can engage in both seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback. Entrepreneurs can actively manage the feedback-seeking paradox across interactions by seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback through combining and switching between multiple differentiation and integration strategies to pursue multiple goals. This overall ambidextrous approach to feedback seeking allows entrepreneurs to attend to both development and protection goals simultaneously instead of choosing between them.

8.2.4. How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?

The third research question that emerged through the research process and guided this doctoral thesis was: *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?.* In addressing this research question, my findings reveal that venture emergence, with the conflicting tensions and demands it poses on entrepreneurs, triggers motivations to proactively seek feedback and to proactively refrain from seeking feedback. My findings also reveal that engaging in ambidextrous feedback seeking, which is entrepreneurs' efforts to pursue contradictory feedback-seeking goals through both proactively seeking feedback and proactively refraining

from seeking feedback using diverse strategies, aids venture emergence because it enables them to develop new or enhanced capabilities and resources, while maintaining current capabilities, resources, and relationships. Thus, the emergent dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence proposes that the relationship between entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and venture emergence is self-referential whereby the venture emergence paradox initiates the feedback-seeking process and venture emergence is influenced by entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking.

8.3. Domains of contribution

The main goals of this study were to understand why entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback, how they seek feedback, and how their feedback seeking relates to venture emergence. My analysis informed a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence, the details of which contribute to our understanding of entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour as fields of research, and of paradox as a theoretical framework in significant ways.

8.3.1. Entrepreneurship

My findings on entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking offer novel insights for entrepreneurship research. In particular, my core contributions focus on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, which is the topic of this thesis, social entrepreneurship, which is the research context for this study, and entrepreneurship micro-foundations, which is the underpinning perspective for this study. Arising from the data are additional and unexpected implications for research into communities of inquiry and the role of close social ties in entrepreneurship.

8.3.1.1. Entrepreneurs' feedback seeking

The core contribution of this doctoral thesis is a new model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence, which explicates the triggers, conflicting drivers, strategies, consequences, and an overall "both/and" approach of feedback seeking. My findings provide a novel and complementary perspective of feedback processes in entrepreneurship by highlighting the proactive, personal, and social elements of interpersonal feedback seeking. Past research and practice-oriented literatures have emphasised the role of market feedback received in the form of demand or through launching product prototypes, piloting services, and changing business models in the creation of new ventures or offerings (e.g. Andries et al., 2013; Bhave, 1994; Brown, 2008; 2009; Ries, 2011). This thesis advances a complementary perspective by emphasising interpersonal feedback seeking between the entrepreneur and other individuals and provides the foundations for future research on this emerging perspective. It introduces new concepts, such as development and protection feedback-seeking goals, goal-setting complexity, and differentiation and integration feedback-seeking strategies; re-evaluates relationships, such as the complex interaction between feedback seeking and venture emergence; and applies established concepts, such as paradox, ambidexterity, and behavioural complexity, to a new phenomenon (i.e. feedback seeking). This novel model with its new concepts and re-evaluated relationships helps us to re-conceptualise entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking beyond a simple act with an instrumental purpose, a bright side, and a simple relationship with performance.

Beyond a simple act. My findings extend the current view of interpersonal feedback seeking as a simple act to a dynamic process with a both/and approach. Emerging research on entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking describes the phenomenon as a simple action to gain information that just seems to happen and often a detailed portrayal of this action is missing (e.g. Fisher, 2012; Katre & Salipante, 2012). My findings re-conceptualise this view by explicating the process of feedback seeking with diverse drivers,

short- and long-term strategies to seek feedback, its cognitive (e.g. goal-setting complexity as a type of cognitive complexity) and behavioural attributes, and outcomes. This process view highlights the complexity of feedback seeking and the creativity of entrepreneurs in developing novel strategies to seek feedback. The emergent model emphasises the dynamic nature of feedback seeking as each feedback-seeking interaction fuels the process again as well as influences future feedback-seeking interactions by embedding learning in the development and enhancement of feedback-seeking goals and strategies. Ultimately, my findings offer a new theoretical lens that conceptualises feedback seeking as a "both/and" phenomenon whereby entrepreneurs engage in this dynamic process to proactively seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback to achieve different goals.

Beyond an instrumental purpose. My findings extend the current view of interpersonal feedback seeking as having only an instrumental purpose. Emerging research on entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking describes the phenomenon only in relation to the usefulness of the obtained information for the benefit of the venture, for example to gain first customers (Corner & Wu, 2012) or to balance radical and incremental innovation (Volery et al., 2015). My findings re-conceptualise this view by explicating not only the venture-oriented concerns entrepreneurs experience when seeking feedback, but also their self- and other-oriented concerns. My findings differentiate the specific instrumental benefits of feedback seeking for the venture, such as reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building reputation. They also suggest that entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is influenced by a range of personal concerns, such as limited personal resources, maintaining personal reputation, and tensions with other domains of their lives. Additionally, entrepreneurs also consider other-oriented concerns, such as the impact of their feedback seeking on the resources and emotions of feedback sources. Explicating these venture-, self-, and other-oriented concerns together illuminates the links and tensions between

entrepreneur and venture beyond the instrumental purpose of feedback seeking.

Beyond the bright side. My findings challenge the current view of interpersonal feedback seeking as having only positive outcomes. Emerging research on entrepreneurs' interpersonal feedback seeking highlights only the expected positive outcomes for the entrepreneur (e.g. Frese, 2007; 2009) or the venture (e.g. Katre & Salipante, 2012; Volery et al., 2015). My findings re-conceptualise this view by explicating the negative outcomes entrepreneurs expect from seeking feedback. They illuminate the negative outcomes entrepreneurs expect on their personal lives (e.g. limited personal resources, damaged relationships with significant others), professional role (e.g. damaged reputation), and ventures (e.g. lost competitiveness, damaged relationships with stakeholders, damaged venture reputation) as a result of the content of the feedback received or others' perceptions of the act itself. Thus, my findings suggest that feedback-seeking outcomes can vary across levels of analysis based on the development or the protection of the entrepreneur and the venture. On the one hand, the development or the protection of the entrepreneur and the venture can be mutually reinforcing (e.g. learning, damaging personal and venture reputation). On the other hand, the development and the protection of the entrepreneur and the venture can be mutually exclusive (e.g. learning and managing venture reputation).

Beyond a simple relationship with performance. My findings complicate our understanding of theories of entrepreneurial action, such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008) and action regulation (Frese, 2007; 2009), by challenging the implicit assumption that the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence, or venture performance more broadly, is direct and positive. As the emerging research on the topic has focused on the bright side of feedback seeking, there is an implicit assumption that more feedback seeking is beneficial for venture emergence (e.g. Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; 2008), or venture performance more broadly. Not only do my findings challenge the focus only on the

bright side of feedback seeking, but they also suggest that the relationship between feedback seeking and venture emergence is complex. My findings suggest that the relationship between entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and venture emergence is self-referential whereby the venture emergence paradox initiates the feedback-seeking process and venture emergence is influenced by entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking. The emergent model of ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence teases out the multiple pathways (i.e. reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings, and building reputation) by which feedback seeking, as a key entrepreneurship micro-foundation, contributes to venture emergence. However, it also elaborates how feedback seeking can hinder venture emergence (i.e. allocation of resources, lost competitiveness, damaged relationships with stakeholders, and damaged reputation). From this perspective, the new concept of ambidextrous feedback seeking is crucial for seeking feedback in an overall productive way that recognises that proactively refraining from feedback seeking is also beneficial. The emergent model thus implies that effectuation and action regulation theories would benefit from incorporating that more ambidextrous feedback seeking is beneficial, not simply more feedback seeking.

Overall, the proposed new model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence transforms our current understanding of feedback seeking from a single act that is assumed to be beneficial (e.g. Gemmell et al., 2012; Volery et al., 2015) to a complex and dynamic process, which offers several directions for future research. The first step to take this research forward is to test the model with different samples (e.g. nascent commercial entrepreneurs, high-tech entrepreneurs, etc.) and consider other indicators of venture performance more generally, such as market share and internationalisation. More broadly, future research will benefit from considering feedback seeking as a process with multiple intricacies and specifying when positive and negative outcomes can be expected at specific levels as well as across levels of analysis. In this line of research, it is important to consider,

capture, and analyse how feedback seeking can be enacted with different strategies in pursuit of multiple goals with diverse sources and content as well as changes of goals and strategies over time to reflect the dynamic nature of feedback seeking. Additionally, it will be beneficial for future research to specify the role of feedback seeking as a pathway that contributes to venture emergence, or venture performance more generally, for example through reputation building or learning as meso-level phenomena.

8.3.1.2. Social entrepreneurship

My findings extend the notion of hybridity to entrepreneurial behaviour by demonstrating how social entrepreneurs embed both cooperation and competition in everyday actions. While the notion of hybridity in social entrepreneurship has largely focused on how social ventures combine elements from the not-for-profit and commercial sectors (for reviews see Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014), a few studies have also considered how individuals engaged in social entrepreneurship can also be hybrids. For example, social entrepreneurs and employees of social ventures can hold mixed identities that combine and value elements from both the not-for-profit and commercial sectors (Besharov, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2015; Wry & York, 2015). My findings contribute to this emerging stream of research on the hybridity of individuals engaged in social entrepreneurship by demonstrating how social entrepreneurs combine elements of these two spheres (i.e. cooperation and competition) in their daily actions and interactions, such as feedback seeking.

My findings build on previous research by demonstrating that social entrepreneurs are concerned not only with cooperation but also with competition. Previous research emphasises social entrepreneurs' cooperation and collaboration with other organisations, communities, and individuals (Corner & Ho, 2010; Di Domenico et al., 2010; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Shaw & Carter, 2007). My findings suggest that feedback seeking is another way for social entrepreneurs to involve venture stakeholders as well as family

members, friends, and peers. However, my findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurs are also concerned with the competitiveness of their ventures, which is surprising given the emphasis on cooperation and compassion in the literature (e.g. André & Pache, 2014; Di Domenico et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2012; Shaw & Carter, 2007). Social entrepreneurs recognise that being first to market can be a position of advantage. They aim to benefit from this position in two different ways. First, social entrepreneurs are concerned with protecting their ideas so similar ventures or not-for-profit organisations addressing the same social issues do not replicate them. This can be a strong motivation in relation to competing with established entities with resources. Some social entrepreneurs in the study developed these concerns for protecting their ideas during their venture emergence journeys. They witnessed other entrepreneurs' ideas being appropriated or had their own ideas replicated by competing ventures and not-for-profit organisations. Other social entrepreneurs already started their venture emergence journeys with concerns about maintaining competitiveness and protecting their ideas based on previous entrepreneurial experiences or being more business aware. Second, my findings suggest that social entrepreneurs are concerned with making fast decisions and entering the market quickly in order to be competitive. They are aware how lengthy decision-making and feedback-seeking processes can delay trading activities, which can provide opportunities for competing organisations. Thus, social entrepreneurs engage in both cooperation and competition.

Considering that social entrepreneurs' everyday actions embed both cooperation and competition provides exciting avenues for future research. Future studies can examine in detail how social entrepreneurs incorporate cooperation and competition in their daily actions by investigating other types of actions and interactions beyond feedback seeking. They can also investigate how and when engaging in both cooperation and competition can be beneficial for social entrepreneurs (e.g. earning a salary, recruiting talent) and social ventures (e.g. creating and scaling social impact, crowdfunding

campaigns). Future research can also explore the hybrid nature of social entrepreneurship across levels of analysis by examining how combinations of social and commercial elements can be enacted on individual, interpersonal, team, and organisational levels. For example, future research can examine how social entrepreneurs make decisions or communicate with investors, how team formation processes occur, or how social ventures build reputation in ways that combine elements from both the social and the commercial spheres.

8.3.1.3. Entrepreneurship micro-foundations

My findings advance and complicate our understanding of micro-foundations by adopting a bottom-up approach, which illuminates the dynamic and complex nature of micro-foundations. The micro-foundations of entrepreneurship are actions, interactions, relationships, and cognition that contribute to higher-level outcomes, such as venture emergence (Shepherd, 2015; van Burg & Romme, 2014). An important element of micro-foundations is that they provide a transparent structure or process that explains why and how higher-order phenomena occur (Barney & Felin, 2013; van Burg & Romme, 2014). Previous research has focused on examining the multiple micro-foundations underpinning a single higher-order phenomenon, such as entrepreneurial adaptation (Bryant, 2012), thus adopting a top-down approach that starts with the higher-order phenomenon, rather than a micro-foundation, and describes these structures as static. However, by investigating a single micro-foundation, in this case feedback seeking, this doctoral thesis demonstrates that there is value in examining micro-foundations through a bottom-up approach that explicates how a single micro-foundation can contribute to a higher-order outcome in different and dynamic ways through multiple pathways, roles, and enactments. Thus, my findings highlight the need to consider transparent structures of micro-foundations as dynamic, branching out in different directions, and depending on different enactments of the interaction.

Feedback seeking exemplifies how micro-foundations can be complex and dynamic processes with multiple pathways, roles, and

enactments. First, micro-foundations can contribute to higher-order outcomes through multiple pathways. This means that micro-foundations can contribute to different meso-order outcomes which then alone or in combination with each other contribute to even higher-order outcomes. For example, feedback seeking can influence venture emergence, which is a higher-order phenomenon, through reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building reputation, which are meso-order phenomena. Second, micro-foundations can have multiple roles. They can influence a specific pathway in both positive and negative ways. For example, feedback seeking can help entrepreneurs to "be seen" and perceived as responsive, engaging, and making a difference, but it can also be perceived as a sign of vulnerability, insecurity, and lack of knowledge. Third, considering the different pathways and roles of micro-foundations can also influence how these actions and interactions are performed (e.g. differentiation or integration feedback-seeking strategies), or not performed at all. Fourth, micro-foundations can be complex and dynamic processes. My findings demonstrate that micro-foundations, such as feedback seeking, can be complex and dynamic processes that involve deliberation, planning, multiple conscious or unconscious decisions, and learning and developing repertoires of how to perform specific actions and interactions, instead of simple one-off activities.

Considering micro-foundations of entrepreneurship as dynamic and complex processes with multiple pathways, roles, and enactments has several implications for future research particularly on actions and interactions as micro-foundations. The first implication is that future research on micro-foundations should conceptualise them as processes with intricacies, decisions, barriers, and different enactments, which requires methods and measures that capture them as processes, instead of single behaviours. The second implication is that future research should recognise that micro-foundations of entrepreneurship do not contribute to a higher-order phenomenon in a linear fashion, instead they can have multiple pathways and roles of influence. This means that future research will

benefit from understanding the multiple roles of a micro-foundation and how these roles may impact the desirability to engage in the action or interaction and its specific enactment. Finally, future research can benefit from considering and capturing the dynamic nature of micro-foundations and how they can create different outcomes over time based on learning and development of enactment repertoires.

8.3.1.4. Communities of inquiry

My findings also have implications for the new concepts of entrepreneurial communities of inquiry by providing initial insights into how entrepreneurs engage with communities of inquiry through seeking feedback, on what topics, and who may belong to such communities. Recognising the need for a more interactive perspective of entrepreneurship, Shepherd (2015) introduces the concept of "communities of inquiry" which represents potential stakeholders who provide feedback and contribute to the refinement of entrepreneurial opportunities. From this perspective, developing and exploiting opportunities involves subjecting them to the standards, ideas, and needs of communities to correct and revise the opportunities (Shepherd, 2015). While my research did not set out to directly investigate entrepreneurial communities of inquiry, it provides several insights into this new concept because feedback seeking is a type of engagement with an entrepreneur's community of inquiry.

My findings suggest that entrepreneurs can engage communities of inquiry on various topics using various strategies. They extend the initial proposition that entrepreneurs engage communities of inquiry on strategic topics related to the entrepreneurial opportunity (Shepherd, 2015) by suggesting that entrepreneurs can also engage with their communities in relation to management, operations, and entrepreneurs' personal capacities and challenges, which may be somewhat distant from the entrepreneurial opportunity. My findings also illuminate the specific strategies entrepreneurs can use to engage with their communities of inquiry through seeking feedback, and sometimes to refrain from

engaging with these communities (or parts of them). Entrepreneurs can engage communities of inquiry with one-off differentiation strategies and even segment their communities into sub-communities for different feedback topics. They can also adopt long-term initiatives to build and enhance communities of inquiry with integration strategies. This raises interesting questions for future research on the short- and long-term strategies entrepreneurs use to engage with their communities of inquiry beyond feedback seeking.

More broadly, my findings provide initial insights into who belongs to communities of inquiry. In line with the initial conceptualisation of communities of inquiry (Shepherd, 2015), my findings demonstrate that venture stakeholders belong to a community of inquiry and are asked for feedback. Such individuals can be co-founders, employees, volunteers, current or potential customers, current or potential beneficiaries, funders or investors, and partner organisations. However, my findings extend this notion by demonstrating that entrepreneurs also seek feedback from two broader groups. First, entrepreneurs can seek feedback from individuals in the broader entrepreneurship field or specific sectors, such as (retired) professionals and experts; individuals in position of power, such as policy makers; charity leaders and other social or commercial entrepreneurs, who are not immediately related to the venture. Second, entrepreneurs can also seek feedback from individuals from their personal lives, such as family members, friends, mentors, and previous co-workers. These findings on feedback sources suggest that the individuals belonging to an entrepreneur's community of inquiry may not all be related to the entrepreneurial opportunity, but can also come from different domains of the entrepreneur's personal and professional life. This suggests communities of inquiry are partially formed around an entrepreneur (e.g. family members, friends, former co-workers) and partially around an opportunity (e.g. professionals and experts). This raises interesting questions about the members of communities of inquiry of serial and portfolio entrepreneurs who are engaged with

more than one opportunity, either over time or at a given time, which can be explored by future research.

8.3.1.5. The role of close social ties in entrepreneurship

My findings enrich our understanding of the relationship between close social ties and entrepreneurship by illuminating how the personal and work domains of entrepreneurs spill over into each other creating synergies and tensions. While my research did not set out to directly investigate close social ties, the data provides interesting insights into the their contradictory role in the entrepreneurship process. On the one hand, entrepreneurs' personal and work domains spill over into each other in synergetic ways. Close social ties, such as family members and friends, can have a positive influence on entrepreneurs' venture emergence journeys by providing feedback. Providing feedback is similar to more traditional types of support, such as funding, human resources, emotional support (Reynolds & White, 1997), generating positive affect, skills, and abilities that entrepreneurs can use in the venture (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). Due to trusting relationships and their proximity, family members and friends are often among the first to be asked for feedback on ideas for new features, products, services, and processes because seeking feedback from them requires fewer resources, such as time or energy. Seeking feedback from close social ties is also easier, compared to other feedback sources, because of the high levels of trust, which lessens entrepreneurs' concerns with protecting ideas to maintain competitiveness. Therefore, entrepreneurs leverage the experience and expertise of close social ties in specific areas (e.g. marketing, accounting, design) to gain feedback on various aspects of the venture to reduce response uncertainty, learn, and improve offerings.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs' personal and work domains spill over into each other to create tensions and contradictions. In a very benevolent way, close social ties may hinder the venture emergence process by providing feedback that is not critical and meaningful. Entrepreneurs perceive that in their desire to be

supportive, close social ties are concerned with protecting the feelings of the entrepreneurs when providing feedback without recognising how it may have a negative impact on the venture. Yet entrepreneurs can engage in a similar protective behaviour toward close social ties. When they are struggling with launching a venture, they may not seek feedback from family members and friends because they do not want to worry them. In such situations, they may also refrain from seeking feedback to protect their image and avoid disappointing family members and friends. However, when entrepreneurs constantly seek feedback from close social ties about the venture, they may bore, upset, and annoy them. In such situations, close social ties can respond by ignoring feedback requests or demonstrating their negative feelings toward the feedback requests and lack of work-life balance, thus catalysing interpersonal conflict. Entrepreneurs may also experience interpersonal conflict with significant others due to the financial implications of starting a venture that may not provide a salary for the entrepreneur, thus facing pressure to "get a real job". While pursuing multiple income sources, such as patchwork, part- or full-time employment, is not unusual for small-firm owners (Carter, Tagg & Dimitratos, 2004), it creates resources constraints for entrepreneurs in relation to the time, energy, and efforts they can devote to starting a new venture. This highlights the proposition that starting a venture is a household decision (Carter, 2011) and it affects entrepreneurs' interpersonal relationships with family members and friends.

Such a nuanced understanding of close social ties as a double-edged sword raises interesting questions in relation to the synergies and conflicts between ventures and close social ties. Considering the complementary, yet contradictory relationship between close social ties and venture emergence, future research can investigate what approaches entrepreneurs use to create and use synergies between the two domains as well as how they manage the conflicts. Additionally future research can explore how these synergies, tensions, and entrepreneurs' approaches to them change over time in relation to the life course of entrepreneurs (Davis & Shaver, 2012)

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but also the life cycle of the venture. For example, future research can investigate how entrepreneurs at different life course stages can face different synergies and tensions as well as how the attitudes of close social ties toward the venture change over time and what influences such changes.

8.3.2. Feedback seeking in organisational behaviour

Studying entrepreneurs' feedback seeking with a ground theory approach and employing a paradox lens takes a well-established concepts in organisational behaviour research to a new context using an novel method and a novel theoretical framework. Organisational behaviour research has largely focused on capturing individuals' general tendencies in seeking feedback often with blunt instruments that do not differentiate between the various ways in which individuals seek feedback and ignore the process of seeking feedback (Ashford et al., 2016). By employing a grounded theory approach, my findings present a nuanced view of feedback seeking as a process. By investigating this well-established concept in a novel context that highlights individuals' work as uncertain and focused on multiple goals, my findings can also help us understand feedback seeking amongst individuals who are not entrepreneurs, yet have work contexts with similar characteristics. This combination of a new method, a new context, and a new theoretical lens allows me to consider the diverse enactments and nature of feedback seeking, re-conceptualise the concept from feedback seeking at work to work-related feedback seeking that can occur outside of the walls of organisations, and consider multiple instrumental purposes and other-oriented concerns. I elaborate on these insights next.

8.3.2.1. Beyond frequency of feedback seeking

My findings suggest a reframing of feedback-seeking behaviour as complex and ambidextrous phenomenon that embeds diverse enactments and dynamics. Adopting a paradox lens contrasts with previous organisational behaviour research on feedback seeking,

which adopts a contingency perspective that assumes that, in light of conflicting motivations, individuals either seek or do not seek feedback. This approach often measures frequency of feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015) with items, such as "How frequently do you directly ask your supervisor for feedback about your work?" (De Stobbeleir et al., 2011, p. 820). The only other option that individuals may employ to gain feedback is monitoring, which is measured with items, such as "In order to find out how well you are performing in your present job, how FREQUENTLY do you [o]bserve what performance behaviors your boss rewards and use this as feedback on your own performance?" (Ashford, 1986, p. 487). My findings add to monitoring as a way to seek feedback by offering eight new strategies, which also include two different ways to refrain from seeking feedback: temporal avoidance, source avoidance, segmentation, searching, framing, establishing feedback relationships, creating feedback-seeking routines, and creating feedback channels. While their relevance for employees in organisations is yet to be determined by future research, it is plausible to suggest that employees also engage in source avoidance (e.g. from peers or supervisors), segmentation, searching for new sources across work and personal domains, carefully framing feedback requests, and even building personal feedback relationships. The diversity of these feedback-seeking strategies and the finding that ambidextrous feedback seeking aids venture emergence suggest that capturing how individuals seek feedback is at least as important as how frequently they do so. Additionally, my findings highlight that feedback-seeking goals and strategies change over time as individuals learn from previous feedback-seeking interactions, become aware of the possible negative outcomes of seeking feedback, and seek novel ways to seek feedback to address conflicting motivations.

Employing a paradox lens to study entrepreneurs' feedback seeking points to several implications for future research on employees' feedback seeking in terms of both research questions and research design. My findings highlight opportunities to

conceptualise feedback seeking as a "both/and" phenomenon instead of an "either/or" one. This conceptualisation requires a shift in research questions and measurement. Thus instead of measuring only frequency of feedback seeking, future research should also measure how employees perform feedback seeking with different strategies, including types of avoidance, as well as short- and long-term approaches in relation to personal and organisational outcomes. Such a conceptualisation also has implications for research design and suggests longitudinal and diary studies that capture the breadth of feedback-seeking strategies and sources, their variation over time, and the learning through which employees may adapt and develop new feedback-seeking strategies.

8.3.2.2. Beyond the walls of the organisation

My findings suggest a reframing of the phenomenon from *feedback seeking at work* to *work-related feedback seeking* which can occur outside of the walls of organisations. Previous research in organisational behaviour has focused on measuring feedback seeking from supervisors and only a handful of studies have included peers (Ashford, 1986; De Stobbeleir et al., 2011; Callister et al., 1999). However, this approach is limiting and extrapolating from my findings on entrepreneurs suggests that individuals seek feedback in relation to their work inside and outside of the employing organisation as well as outside of the work domain. This may include individuals in their work context, such as supervisors, peers, subordinates, clients, suppliers, team members, and collaborators from partner organisations. It may also include individuals outside of their work, such as mentors, former co-workers, and even family members and friends.

Considering how individuals engage in work-related feedback seeking outside of organisations can be particularly relevant for individuals pursuing new career forms (e.g. portfolio workers), less traditional occupational activities (e.g. crafting leisure activities), and new work contexts (e.g. virtual work) as their work can have similar characteristics to the work of entrepreneurs. In the latest stage of

capitalist development, work can take diverse forms, as paid or unpaid, and it is increasingly influenced by uncertainty, which is a defining characteristic of entrepreneurship (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Drawing on the similarities between entrepreneurs and individuals with less traditional work activities can offer novel insights into how such individuals engage in feedback seeking, thus drawing closer links between entrepreneurship and organisational behaviour research, as suggested by other researchers (e.g. Baron, 2008; 2010). For example, individuals pursuing missed or additional occupational callings outside of work through volunteering, hobby participation, and passion projects (Berg, Grant & Johnson, 2010) and portfolio workers obtaining a variety of pieces of work for different clients or employers (Clinton, Totterdell & Wood, 2006) face challenges around isolation, uncertainty, overload, and conservation of resources similar to the entrepreneurs in my study. Another example of a new work context outside of traditional organisations is virtual work, which is characterised by lack of proximity, difficulties in establishing trust, sporadic feedback, and limited opportunities for spontaneous feedback (MacDuffie, 2007). These new forms of work and careers highlight the need for feedback to make work meaningful, to learn, and to improve. However, they also present numerous challenges to obtain feedback due to limited social interaction, lack of resources, and possible lack of formal feedback giving processes, similar to entrepreneurs. While additional research is needed to test the proposed model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking, it is plausible to suggest that individuals crafting their leisure activities to pursue occupational callings, portfolio workers, and those engaged in virtual work may experience the same motivations to proactively refrain from seeking feedback and employ some of the same strategies. For example, they may form personal feedback teams of friends, family members, and peers to seek work-related feedback.

Considering work-related feedback seeking as a phenomenon that can occur outside of traditional organisations and the challenges of seeking work-related feedback in new forms of work and careers

suggests several avenues for future research. First, future research can consider work-related feedback seeking outside of the organisation by capturing in more detail the diverse feedback sources of employees and individuals with less traditional work or careers and how these feedback sources are selected in different situations. Second, future research can investigate the feedback-seeking differences between individuals in paid and unpaid work, such as volunteering or passion projects, as well as between individuals in more traditional work settings and those engaged in new forms of work (e.g. portfolio workers) or in new contexts (e.g. virtual work). Such research can provide interesting insights into the challenges and strategies of seeking feedback in the 21st century. Finally, virtual work can provide a great context to understand the role of technology in how individuals seek feedback and give feedback, particularly in relation to framing feedback requests.

8.3.2.3. Beyond a single instrumental purpose

My findings provide a nuanced understanding of the goals that motivate individuals to seek work-related feedback beyond a single instrumental goal. Previous research in organisational behaviour has focused on the instrumental value of feedback and how it motivates individuals to seek feedback to achieve valued goals (Ashford et al., 2003; 2016). Beyond assuming that individuals seek feedback because they value feedback, my findings provide a more nuanced picture of what makes feedback seeking valuable in relation to four goals: reducing response uncertainty, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building reputation. Seeking feedback enhances existing or develops new individual or venture capabilities (e.g. entrepreneurs' skills and approaches) and resources (e.g. reputation). While the applicability of these goals for non-entrepreneurs needs to be tested with future research, this nuanced understanding of why individuals may seek feedback suggests multiple instrumental feedback-seeking goals. My findings also suggest that what makes feedback seeking valuable for individuals is not just the expected content of the feedback message for achieving

goals, but also how the act of seeking feedback itself can aid the achievement of goals. Distinguishing between different instrumental purposes of feedback seeking suggests that individuals seek feedback for multiple purposes and why they seek feedback shapes how they do so: what type of feedback they seek on what topics and from whom. Future research can benefit from explicitly testing which goals individuals value the most when seeking feedback and how these diverse goals interact with other moderators, such as relational context, that may hinder feedback seeking. Additionally, future research can examine what job and organisational characteristics trigger specific goals and how individuals' goals change as job and organisational characteristics change.

8.3.2.4. Beyond self-oriented concerns

My findings provide a nuanced understanding of the interactions between self- , venture-, and other-oriented concerns in feedback seeking. Research in organisational behaviour conceptualises feedback seeking as an individual resource (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983) and emphasised how individuals' self-oriented concerns influence whether they seek feedback (e.g. instrumental motive) or refrain from seeking feedback (e.g. self- and public image protection). My findings build on this research to highlight that individuals consider self-, venture-, and other-oriented concerns when seeking feedback. Not only are individuals concerned with their self- and public views, which has been the focus of organisational behaviour research so far (e.g. Anseel et al., 2015; Hays & Williams, 2011; Levy et al., 1995; Tuckey et al., 2002), but they may also consider the impact of their feedback seeking on the resources and emotions of feedback sources, such as family members, friends, customers, as well as the impact on the organisation in relation to maintaining competitiveness, which may motivate them to proactively refrain from seeking feedback. Thus, my findings introduce new explanations for why individuals may refrain from feedback seeking. However, other-oriented concerns may motivate individuals to seek feedback to give others voice and make

them feel involved in the process. Individuals may also seek feedback to improve products, services, and processes in a way that makes them more appealing and useful for customers, beneficiaries, or other users, such as co-workers or suppliers. This novel insight into other-oriented concerns suggests new directions for future research that examines the relationship between other-oriented concerns, such as prosocial motivation (Bolino & Grant, 2016), and feedback seeking. Future research can examine under what conditions other-oriented concerns motivate and hinder feedback seeking and with what consequences.

8.3.3. Paradox theory

Applying paradox theory to a new context (i.e. entrepreneurs' feedback seeking) also enriches paradox research by bridging research streams on responses to paradox and individual capabilities. To date two independent streams of research employ a paradox lens: one investigating organisational responses to tensions (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jay, 2013) and another focusing on the attributes that enable individuals to enact multiple and contradictory roles (e.g. Denison et al., 1995; Hart & Quinn, 1993; Hooijberg & Choi, 2000; Lawrence et al., 2009). The paradox research at the organisational level of analysis focuses on how exactly actors respond to paradoxical tensions and largely ignores what enables them to do so. The paradox research at the individual level of analysis assumes competing roles or responses as a given and investigates individuals' static attributes (e.g. cognitive complexity) that enable them to perform these roles. My findings bridge these two streams of research by explicating how individuals' cognitive and behavioural attributes influence their responses to paradoxical tensions arising from the organisation. My findings suggest that individual cognitive attributes (i.e. goal-setting complexity as a type of cognitive complexity) can play an instrumental role in surfacing tensions, seeking solutions, and enacting responses to paradoxes. They also highlight the enabling

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role of individual behavioural attributes (i.e. behavioural complexity) in developing responses to paradoxical tensions. More importantly, my findings suggest that these individual attributes are not static, but they dynamically develop through enactment of responses as individuals experience different outcomes, learn what works and what does not work, and embed the learning for future responses to tensions. Therefore, my findings provide initial insights into Schard et al.'s (2016) question whether behavioural or cognitive capabilities can be learnt.

My findings on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking advance organisational studies on paradox by highlighting the less economically rational and instrumental elements of paradoxical tensions at the individual level of analysis, thus describing the lived experiences of paradoxes and bringing the individual as a multi-dimensional and dynamic being into paradox research. Organisational studies emphasise that paradoxes embed tensions of economically rational and instrumental opposites that are essential for the performance of organisations (Fairhurst et al., 2016). For example, paradoxical tensions created by combining multiple logics necessary for the functioning of hybrid organisations (Jay, 2013) or engaging in both exploitation and exploration to sustain long-term performance (Adriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). These studies highlight that paradoxes are nested and interwoven across levels of analysis, emphasising the organisation (for reviews see Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016; Schad et al., 2016) whereby senior leaders (Smith, 2014) or middle managers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Luscher & Lewis, 2008) are studied as managers of paradoxes informed by organisations. By highlighting that when it comes to feedback seeking, entrepreneurs experience conflicting self-, venture-, and other-oriented concerns, my findings build on this stream of research. Not only are entrepreneurs' paradoxes informed by the organisation with specific economically rational and instrumental entities, such as competition and speed, but they also embed less economically and organisationally rational and instrumental, but still purposeful, personal entities, such as managing personal resources, maintaining

personally meaningful relationships, and concern for others. Therefore, for entrepreneurs, and possibly for other strategic leaders, paradoxes are not just organisational, but also deeply personal. Paradoxes are not just nested across levels of analysis, bringing together the personal and the organisational, but also across domains bringing together work and life.

Integrating two streams of research on paradox and highlighting the less economically rational and more personal elements of paradoxes provides new avenues for paradox research. Future research can examine responses to paradoxical organisational tensions and what enables or hinders individuals' responses to paradoxes. For example, what other individual attributes, beyond goal-setting and behavioural complexities, can enable individuals to cope with paradoxes? What individual or contextual factors hinder individuals' management of paradoxical tensions arising from the organisation? Additionally, integrating these two streams of research provides new avenues for paradox research that examine paradoxes across levels of analysis. For example, previous research suggests that the exact responses (e.g. various differentiation strategies) organisational actors enact to cope with paradoxical tensions can vary between organisational actors (e.g. Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010; Gotsi et al., 2010). How do individual cognitive and behavioural complexities of employees, middle managers, and senior leaders influence organisational responses to paradoxical tensions? Finally, what is the role of emotions or self- and other-oriented concerns in how individuals experience and respond to paradoxes?

8.4. Implications for practice

This research project has several practical implications for entrepreneurs and for organisations that support entrepreneurs, such as incubators and accelerators. I discuss these practical implications next.

8.4.1. Implications for entrepreneurs

The overall message I have for entrepreneurs is that "to ask or not to ask" is not the right question. Feedback seeking is not an "either/or" decision. Rather, effective feedback seeking requires a "both/and" approach and sensitivity to both the challenges (e.g. allocation of resources, loss of competitiveness, negative impact on relationships and reputation) and benefits (e.g. confidence in decisions, learning, improving offerings and their positioning, and building a positive image) of seeking feedback. It also requires using a variety of different actions to harness the power and minimise the pain of seeking feedback in the long term. More specifically, my model can help entrepreneurs to develop their goal-setting and behavioural complexities by increasing their awareness of specific development and protection goals as well as suggesting concrete feedback-seeking strategies. My findings encourage entrepreneurs to try and learn from each feedback-seeking interaction by being reflective and in this way to enhance their goal-setting and behavioural complexities. I also provide insights into what entrepreneurs can seek feedback about. The literature to date suggests that entrepreneurs seek feedback when designing and improving products and services. My findings suggest that feedback seeking can also be beneficial in many other areas, such as strategic decision making on revenue streams and target markets; the management of the venture; as well as improving personal skills and wellbeing to be an effective entrepreneur and leader.

8.4.2. Implications for entrepreneurship support organisations

My findings also have implications for organisations that provide support to entrepreneurs. In many ways feedback seeking and giving are implicitly embedded across multiple types of support focused on experiential learning and reflection (e.g. mentoring, residential learning events, peer support). However, considering the difficulties of seeking feedback and the protection goals of entrepreneurs, there are several aspects support organisations can consider.

First, support organisations can provide feedback-seeking training and tools to entrepreneurs. Support organisations can provide training and tools for individuals to learn how to seek feedback effectively for multiple purposes and on different topics. This can include workshops, webinars, and self-directed tools which can be downloaded from the web and used to guide individuals through the decision-making process. Such training should recognise that feedback seeking contributes not only to experiential learning and reflection, but has additional benefits such as developing better offerings and building the individual's and the venture's reputation. Such training can particularly focus on enhancing sensitivity to and awareness of all development and protection goals entrepreneurs can pursue in relation to seeking feedback. It can also encourage the development of wide repertoires of feedback-seeking strategies from which entrepreneurs can choose, combine, and switch between (See Appendices D and E for example tools developed based on this thesis for one of the support organisations that provided access for the research).

Second, support organisations can broker access to feedback in multiple ways. My findings suggest that accessing both meaningful feedback and individuals who can provide such feedback is difficult. Support organisations can broker access to feedback and individuals in different ways. One way is offering one-off and short-term feedback events and clinics for entrepreneurs to gather as much feedback as possible in a short period of time. These can include networking and professional speed dating events focused on feedback, as well as conferences, seminars, and workshops with feedback components. Another way could be learning trips, residential learning events, and one-off surgeries. All these interventions can focus on feedback from peers, professionals, and experts for learning and response uncertainty reduction purposes on management and personal style topics. Support organisations can also offer long-term initiatives for entrepreneurs to get small pieces of feedback at a time, have time to act on the feedback, and learn how to seek feedback more effectively in future interactions. Such

initiatives can include mentoring, local, peer and support networks. All these interventions can focus on feedback for response uncertainty reduction, learning and product/service improvement purposes on strategic, management, and personal style topics.

Third, it is important that support organisations carefully select participants for one-off events and long-term initiatives to create trusting environments. Trust is important for feedback seeking because it can lessen entrepreneurs' concerns about exposing vulnerabilities and insecurities, and protecting ideas. Both of these concerns limit the opportunities for reflection and learning because they constrain what entrepreneurs share and seek feedback about. This is particularly relevant for peer learning and peer support networks where selection of peers is usually based on industry (e.g. Emerge Education) or geographical (e.g. Social Incubator North) similarities. However, a better approach may focus on the similarities of customers/beneficiaries or geographical differences.

For example, entrepreneurs working toward enhancing the lives of the same beneficiaries but through different offerings and business models, in different industries or geographical locations may see each other not as direct competitors. This in turn may make it easier for entrepreneurs to be more open and trusting when seeking feedback.

Finally, support organisations can broker access to local or asynchronous feedback. Entrepreneurs in more remote and rural areas and those who have childcare responsibilities may struggle to find relevant individuals to seek feedback from locally or due to time constraints. Brokering access to local feedback sources and providing opportunities for feedback not in real time through technology are two ways to address this issue.

8.5. Limitations and future directions

This study generated a dynamic model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence that can guide future research into feedback concepts and processes

amongst entrepreneurs. As all research, this study has several limitations. Acknowledging these limitations, I present the findings as an early step in examining how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking contributes to the development and establishment of new ventures. These findings and limitations suggest a series of constructive avenues for future research on feedback seeking and paradoxes.

8.5.1. Beyond inductive research: Operationalising constructs and exploring relationships with other constructs

This is an *inductive study* that offers the potential for rich theoretical insights. However, these insights are also dependent on the researcher's judgement and interpretations. While I employed several methods to ensure the trustworthiness and plausibility of the model (see Section 3.6), the next step to take feedback seeking amongst entrepreneurs forward is to develop and validate measures for the main concepts in the model. These measures could be used not only to test this model, but also to enrich this stream of research by examining what activates different feedback-seeking goals (e.g. entrepreneurial approaches such as effectuation or bricolage, context of entrepreneurial activities, or type of entrepreneurial activities) and how effectively managing the feedback-seeking paradox with differentiation and integration strategies can contribute to other individual (e.g. decision making) and venture outcomes (e.g. market share, internationalisation). Leveraging validated measures, future research can examine factors other than goal-setting and behavioural complexities that enable or hinder ambidextrous feedback seeking, as well as what contributes to the development of goal-setting and behavioural complexities. Finally, these measures can be used to examine the possible negative outcomes of engaging in ambidextrous feedback seeking. For example, integrating and differentiating various goals and switching between, combining, and developing new feedback-seeking strategies may have a negative

effect on entrepreneurs' cognitive resources and personal wellbeing, which can also have an impact on their ventures.

8.5.2. Beyond a single explanation: Exploring alternative explanations

The situations of the eight entrepreneurs in the polar sub-sample, as well as the development goals pursued by the least successful entrepreneurs may provide *alternative explanations* for the outcomes. These alternative explanations relate to time effects, industry effects, and goal profiles.

First, it is possible that the four entrepreneurs who established operational, innovative, and growing ventures had more time to do so. However, the data shows that this explanation is not plausible. Considering only the age of the venture before joining the project shows that while there was a great variation within the groups of the most and least successful entrepreneurs, between the two groups the variation was similar (see Table 7.4). For example, Daniel H., Roger, and Sadie started at a similar time and their ventures were 8 to 12 months old when they joined the study. Angela J. and Tim started at the same time: 35-36 months before they joined the project. As a matter of fact, the oldest venture belonged to Yvette (168 months) and it became dormant during data collection. Taking a different approach to examine whether the entrepreneurs who were successful simply had more time and were further ahead in the venture emergence process when they joined the research project, I also compared the development stages of the ventures in the two groups. Similar to venture age, development stages varied within the two groups, however, the two groups were relatively similar (see Table 7.4). For example, both groups included ventures in development (Daniel H and Yvette), testing a prototype (Andrew, Tim, and Roger), and selling a product or service (Sadie and Angela J.). This suggests that the difference in outcomes between the most and least successful entrepreneurs is not based on having more time or being further ahead in the venture emergence process.

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Second, it is possible that industry effects influenced venture emergence. While both groups of the most and least successful entrepreneurs had ventures providing health, social, and community or employment services, the most successful group also included business-related services and the least successful group included education. These similarities and differences between the two groups are not clear enough to draw conclusions about the possible industry effects. However, it is important to note that two of the successful ventures operated in two different industries at the same time (WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy and Able Waves). This participation in multiple industries may have had impact on the development of the ventures by giving them access to more customers and sources of funding. While nascent social entrepreneurs may be a very specific sample, which makes it more difficult to access enough participants from the same industry to account for industry effects, future research can benefit from testing the model with a more homogenous sample in relation to industries or participation in one industry only (Davidsson, 2003).

Third, it is possible that certain goals individually or configurations of goals, instead of goal-setting complexity, can account for venture emergence variation. The profiles of the four most successful entrepreneurs and of the two entrepreneurs who exhibited high goal-setting and behavioural complexities from the robustness check (see Section 7.3.1.3) all pursued response uncertainty reduction and learning goals, while these goals were largely missing from the profiles of the four least successful entrepreneurs. Thus, it is possible that pursuing response uncertainty reduction and learning goals individually or as a configuration can account for venture emergence, instead of goal-setting complexity per se. However, due to the inductive nature of the study it is impossible to test for this alternative explanation, partly because if the least successful entrepreneurs' goal profiles included response uncertainty reduction and learning, they would have exhibited high goal-setting complexity. Future research focused on testing the proposed model with deductive designs can examine this alternative

explanation and test whether certain goals, configurations of goals, or goal-setting complexity enable venture emergence.

8.5.3. Beyond nascent social entrepreneurs: Exploring feedback seeking among other groups

First, the context of this study was nascent *social entrepreneurs*. Social entrepreneurship research suggests that social entrepreneurs and social ventures adopt approaches, methods, processes, and perceptions similar to those in commercial entrepreneurship (e.g. Austin et al., 2006; Dacin et al., 2010; Lumpkin et al., 2013), thus I selected nascent social entrepreneurs as a theoretically strategic sample for this study. While feedback seeking can help nascent social entrepreneurs to manage the uncertainty and complexity inherent in social ventures, it can also be dangerous for them in relation to their public image and resources, thus making them a great setting to explore entrepreneurs' motivations to seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback (See Chapter Three). However, it is important to acknowledge that certain parts of the proposed model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking may be more relevant to social than other types of entrepreneurs. These specific aspects include seeking feedback "to be seen as" making a difference and engaging, struggling to access feedback sources due to stigma or physical proximity, and struggling to access meaningful feedback due to the novelty and complexity of the venture. While it can be argued that these experiences may be relevant to innovative entrepreneurs operating in environments of uncertainty, it is important that they are tested by future research with other types of entrepreneurial samples using large scale surveys, longitudinal and diary studies. Future research can examine how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking from employees to be seen as engaging and caring can increase employees' motivation (Grant, 2012) and encourage them to speak up, thus sharing ideas, opinions, and suggestions proactively (Morrison, 2014). The difficulties of accessing feedback sources due to physical proximity may be

particularly relevant for rural entrepreneurs, while accessing meaningful feedback due to novelty and complexity may be a particular struggle for high-tech entrepreneurs, which future research can examine.

More broadly, my model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking proposes that other-oriented concerns are an important factor in deciding whether and how to seek feedback. However, theoretical work proposes that other-oriented concerns, such as compassion, are particularly relevant among social entrepreneurs (Miller et al., 2012). This suggests that social entrepreneurs may be more concerned with protecting others' resources and emotions and managing relationships when seeking feedback, compared to commercial entrepreneurs. However, such tensions between personal relationships and the venture are also common in family businesses (Bacq & Lumpkin, 2014; Cennamo et al., 2012), thus future research can explore the relationship between other-oriented concerns and feedback seeking in the family business setting.

Additionally, maintaining positive relationships with family members, friends, and key venture stakeholders is relevant to entrepreneurs more broadly as all entrepreneurs rely on these individuals for emotional and tangible support as well as for access to customers and talent. This is a reflection of the findings that all individuals pursue self- and other-oriented motives, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Based on this assumption, research on other-oriented concerns in organisational life has been conducted with various groups that are not social entrepreneurs, for example business students (De Dreu, Koole & Steinel, 2000) and military officers (Grant & Berry, 2011), thus recognising that other-oriented concerns may be exhibited in different ways. For example, other-oriented concerns may not be evident in the types of ventures individuals create (i.e. social vs commercial), yet they may be evident in other entrepreneurial activities, such as opportunity identification, resource mobilisation (Van de Ven, Sapienza & Villanueva, 2007), and philanthropy (e.g. Mickiewicz,

Sauka & Stephan, 2015). Ultimately, future research is needed to establish the magnitude of other-oriented concerns on entrepreneurs' feedback seeking and the specific strategies enacted by entrepreneurs in general as well as those in particular settings (e.g. family business, innovative entrepreneurship).

Considering the central role of paradoxes in this study, it is possible that social entrepreneurs are in a better position to manage paradoxes in general as such conflicting tensions are embedded in the nature of social venture (e.g. Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Smith, Gonin & Besharov, 2013). Social entrepreneurs' high other-oriented concerns (Miller et al., 2012) and experiences with other tensions and paradoxes (Jay, 2013) may have influenced their integrative thinking, thus leading to the development of a wider repertoire of differentiation and integration strategies and an overall ambidextrous approach. While integrative thinking is exhibited not only by social entrepreneurs, but also by commercial entrepreneurs (e.g. Plambeck & Weber, 2009), this limitation highlights the need to conduct additional research on feedback seeking with other types of entrepreneurs (e.g. commercial or high-technology) as they may be less prepared to deal with paradoxes more generally. This also raises an interesting question about the spillover effects of paradoxes from one domain to another. How does experiencing and managing paradox in one domain affect managing paradoxes in a different domain? Can dealing with paradoxes in one domain contribute to the development of goal-setting and behavioural complexities in a different domain even if the paradoxes are not directly related to each other? What types of individuals are better suited for dealing with paradoxes? For example, individuals who practice or are influenced by Eastern philosophies in their personal lives may be more accepting of paradoxical tensions and in a better position to manage them effectively (Lewis, 2000).

Second, the context of this study was *nascent* social *entrepreneurs.* Studying nascent social entrepreneurs provides several methodological opportunities, such as overcoming hindsight and survival bias, which have been leveraged by other researchers

(e.g. Yitshaki & Kropp, 2015). Yet my findings highlight that entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is triggered by a venture emergence paradox and develops through interactions. While paradoxical tensions are rife in established organisations in various sectors and industries (e.g. Gotsi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jay, 2013; Kreutzer & Jacobs, 2011; Lado, Dant & Tekleab, 2008), these findings raise interesting questions about how entrepreneurs' feedback seeking changes over time, especially in relation to the venture emergence process. However, my strategically chosen sample includes only nascent entrepreneurs. Thus future research can employ a longitudinal approach to feedback seeking with a longer timeframe and examine the process as entrepreneurs and their ventures transition from one phase of the process to another. For example, feedback seeking may be performed differently as ventures transition from nascent to new and established phases with different purposes and content of feedback. It is possible that different goals and content of feedback are prevalent at different phases of the entrepreneurship process. For example, at the very early stages, before products and services are marketed, entrepreneurs may be more concerned with being first to market, but once they are an established player in the market with a specific offering, this goal may be less salient. Additionally, the content of feedback may change as the venture develops and transitions between different phases. For example, while at the early stages entrepreneurs may seek feedback to learn about processes of production and legal structures of their ventures, once they have an established venture with diverse groups of employees, they may seek more feedback about organisational structures and leadership skills. Thus, a longitudinal approach with a longer timeframe to examine entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can be greatly beneficial in understanding the nuances of the process over time, including how goals, content, sources, and strategies change.

8.5.4. Beyond interviews: Exploring feedback seeking with alternative data collection methods

Most of the data for this study was gathered through *interviews*. While this data collection method allows for gathering rich narratives, it is also susceptible to retrospective and social desirability biases. To minimise these limitations, I focused on recent events and maintained a tone of supportive neutrality. However, this limitation can have implications for the richness of my findings on motivations to refrain from seeking feedback. The academic and practice-oriented literatures and even the media highlight the positive role of feedback and feedback seeking in entrepreneurship. Considering this positive portrayal, it is possible that social desirability bias made participants less likely to share instances of proactively refraining from seeking feedback and the motivations behind these instances. However, the data was abundant with instances of and motivations to proactively refrain from feedback seeking from all participating entrepreneurs. These accounts highlighted entirely new motivations, such as managing and maintaining resources, competitiveness, relationships, and reputation, as well as new and different strategies to proactively refrain from seeking feedback, such as temporal and source avoidance. The richness of the new and diverse protection goals and avoidance strategies suggests that social desirability bias had limited influence on the overall motivations to proactively refrain from seeking feedback.

However, this limitation can possibly explain the relative lack of ego defence as a specific driver for refraining from seeking feedback, which has been studied in relation to why employees do not seek feedback (e.g. Tuckey et al., 2002). In the rare instances that the entrepreneurs revealed information about self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence relevant to seeking (or not) feedback, they did so only in relation to taking actions toward establishing the venture and in service of the venture, instead of as an independent goal. However, this lack of findings in relation to ego defence can also be explained by the characteristics of the sample. Previous research

demonstrates that entrepreneurs generally exhibit high levels of self-efficacy (Markman et al., 2002; Markman et al., 2005) and optimism (Cooper, Woo & Dunkelberg, 1988). Additionally, social entrepreneurs in particular are arguably driven by pro-social and other-focused motivations (Miller et al., 2012). Thus it is possible that for my sample in particular, and entrepreneurs in general, the ego defence motive to refrain from seeking feedback is less salient than it is for employees.

Nonetheless, the data collection limitation of this study suggests new methodological opportunities for future research to study entrepreneurs' feedback seeking. While traditional sources of data in entrepreneurship (e.g. archives, surveys, observations) may not be appropriate for feedback seeking due to its interpersonal and private nature, more innovative methods may be greatly beneficial to identify new motivations to proactively refrain from seeking feedback. For example, quantitative and qualitative diary studies (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003; Iida et al., 2012) and day reconstruction methods (Kahneman et al., 2004) may be much less obtrusive for collecting data compared to observation and at the same time allow researchers to collect real-time rich data about feedback-seeking content, interactions, sources, and outcomes. These methods can also adopt a different approach to ego defence as a possible protection goal. Instead of capturing the goal as a relatively stable construct with measures, such as self-efficacy or self-esteem, these data collection methods can include more momentary measures of a possible ego defence goal. For example, studies can use low- and high-activation unpleasant affect, such as being afraid, discouraged, dejected, depressed, sad, and gloomy (Warr et al., 2014) after a feedback interaction as a predictor of future feedback-seeking interactions. A different approach to study entrepreneurs' feedback seeking in real time and in a natural environment is social media platforms, such as Team Up Start Up, which is an online platform dedicated to seeking and giving feedback to entrepreneurs. Overall, future research on feedback seeking can benefit from using data

collection methods that are less obtrusive, yet allow researchers to collect naturally occurring real-time data about the phenomenon.

8.5.5. Beyond a single perspective: Exploring other feedback perspectives and processes

This study addressed entrepreneurs' feedback seeking *only from the viewpoint of entrepreneurs*. As informants, entrepreneurs were the only individuals who could provide accounts of situations in which they considered seeking feedback but did not engage in a feedback-seeking interaction as well as the motivations behind such decisions. Such lack of feedback-seeking interactions and the motivations behind these non-events would be difficult to observe by the researcher or stakeholders. However, feedback seeking is an interpersonal phenomenon and a richer picture can be painted by examining the topic from an interpersonal and interactive perspective that engages both seekers and givers of feedback. Future feedback-seeking research can involve employees, family members and friends, investors, funders, professionals, and even peers and competitors to assess their reactions to feedback requests from entrepreneurs. This can also help entrepreneurs to become more effective in seeking feedback from these sources. An interesting development of this research can focus specifically on interpersonal feedback seeking between entrepreneurs and their employees. This stream of research can examine the positive and negative effects of using multiple differentiation and integration strategies with employees. On the one hand, entrepreneurs who seek feedback regularly and in multiple ways can serve as role models to employees, thus encouraging them to seek feedback themselves, as well as to share ideas, opinions, and suggestions. In this way entrepreneurs' feedback seeking can create a safe psychological environment for employees' voice and a culture of feedback in the venture. On the other hand, switching between differentiation and integration strategies, which also includes avoiding feedback seeking temporarily or from specific individuals, may also be confusing for

employees, creating a sense of uncertainty. This may inhibit voice and promote silence amongst employees who do not know how to respond to entrepreneurs' diverse feedback-seeking strategies (Morrison, 2014).

Lastly, this study explored *only feedback seeking* as one of the feedback processes that entrepreneurs enact. To generate rich and in-depth insights into entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, I narrowed the focus of this study only to feedback seeking and ignored feedback giving and using, which are the natural processes to follow. While feedback seeking is the first of these processes, a more integrative approach can be beneficial to understand feedback processes in entrepreneurship in general. Such an approach can go beyond why and how entrepreneurs seek feedback to examine how they can gain feedback effectively, how they provide feedback to other entrepreneurs, what "good" feedback looks like, how entrepreneurs make sense of feedback, the mechanisms by which feedback affects entrepreneurial performance, and finally what happens with the feedback they receive. When do entrepreneurs use the feedback they receive and when do they ignore it? What are the consequences of using or ignoring feedback for both the entrepreneur and the venture? Such an integrative approach to feedback processes can trace the pathways through which the content of the feedback message has an impact based on the characteristics of the situation or the characteristics of the feedback source, thus gaining a richer picture of feedback processes.

8.6. Conclusion

Past research highlights interpersonal feedback seeking as an important factor in entrepreneurial processes, such as navigating the uncertainty involved in creating and running new ventures (Katre & Salipante, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001), innovating (Gemmell et al., 2012; Fisher, 2012; Volery et al., 2015), attracting first customers (Corner & Wu, 2012), and making fast strategic decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Despite its role in such important for

entrepreneurs phenomena, feedback seeking seems to be too obvious and taken for granted to be remarkable as a research topic in its own right. Yet findings from research on different entrepreneurship phenomena hint at the complex nature of feedback seeking (e.g. Kate & Salipante, 2012; Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). Understanding the complexities and intricacies of entrepreneurs' feedback seeking is important for entrepreneurship research and practice. To provide a foundation for this stream of research, I sought to answer three main questions: *Why do entrepreneurs seek feedback and refrain from seeking feedback?, How do entrepreneurs seek feedback?,* and *How does entrepreneurs' feedback seeking relate to venture emergence?.* Focusing on these fundamental questions, I developed a new model of entrepreneurs' ambidextrous feedback seeking, thus taking a first step toward understanding entrepreneurs' feedback seeking in general (see Figure 8.1). The emergent model illuminates feedback seeking not as a simple, trivial, and functionalist action, but as a dynamic and complex phenomenon that involves paradoxical feedback-seeking goals that simultaneously drive entrepreneurs to both seek feedback and to refrain from seeking feedback. By employing and switching between different strategies, entrepreneurs leverage short-term trade-offs and long-term synergies of both seeking feedback and refraining from seeking feedback, thus aiding venture emergence.

With the additional research suggested above and others' efforts in examining entrepreneurs' feedback seeking, I hope this study can contribute to creating a stream of research that offers a new and exciting perspective on some of the most challenging questions facing entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship researchers: How do entrepreneurs' everyday actions and interactions influence entrepreneurial and venture performance? How do entrepreneurs involve others in their venture emergence journeys? How do entrepreneurs cope with conflicting goals and attend to competing demands?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screening and background questions used at T1[2]

Eligibility questions

Are you, alone or with others, currently trying to start any kind of activity, organisation or initiative that has a particular social, environmental or community objective? This might include selling products that address the needs of deprived persons, providing services or training to socially deprived or disabled persons, using profits for socially oriented purposes, organising self-help groups for community action or a business with a social, community or environmental purpose.

☐ No ☐ Yes, currently trying to start

Over the past twelve months have you done anything to help start this activity, organisation or initiative, such as looking for equipment or a location, organising a start-up team, working on a business plan, beginning to save money, or any other activity that would help launch it?

☐ No ☐ Yes

Are you starting this new activity, organisation or initiative on your own behalf?

☐ No, for my employer as part of my normal work

☐ Yes, on own behalf

Will you personally manage all, part or none of this intended activity, organisation or initiative?

☐ None ☐ Part ☐ All ☐ Don't know

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[2] Skip logics excluded for ease of reading.

In what month and year did you first think about starting this new activity, organisation or initiative?

Date:_____

In what month and year did you begin working toward starting up this new activity, organisation or initiative?

Date:_____

Do or will any of the revenue for this activity, organisation or initiative come from trading, for example through sales of products or charging for services?

☐ No   ☐ Not yet. Will in the future   ☐ Yes

Has this new activity, organisation or initiative already received any money, income or fees from the sale of goods or services?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

In what month and year did this new activity, organisation or initiative make its first sale?

Date:_____

What percentage of the total income for this new activity, organisation or initiative comes from the sale of goods or services?

_____%

Has monthly revenue ever exceeded monthly expenses for this new activity, organisation or initiative?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Has monthly revenue exceeded monthly expenses for this new activity, organisation or initiative for more than 3 consecutive months?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Are salaries for the managers who are also (co)founders included in the computation of monthly expenses?

☐ No ☐ Partial salary ☐ Yes

What is your vision for this activity, organisation or initiative? What long-term goal(s) does it strive to achieve? Please describe briefly.

_____

What kind of product or service will be provided by the activity, organisation or initiative you are trying to start? Please describe briefly.

_____

Please select your region.

☐ North East

☐ North West

☐ Yorkshire and the Humber

☐ East Midlands

☐ West Midlands

☐ East of England

☐ London

☐ South East

☐ South West

☐ Wales

☐ Scotland

☐ Northern Ireland

Firm-founding activities questions[3]

A business plan usually outlines the markets to be served, the products or services to be provided, the competition, the resources required – including money and financial projections, the expected growth and income for the new social venture. Have you already begun preparation of a business plan?

---

[3] Captured at T1 and those identified as "No, not yet. Will in the future" were captured again at T2.

□ No, not relevant

□ No, not yet. Will in the future

□ Yes

What is the current form of the business plan?

□ Unwritten

□ Informally written

□ Formally prepared

An impact plan or a theory of change usually outlines how social value is created by using available resources, activities and outputs to generate short- and long-term impact. This might be a section in a business plan or a separate document. Have you already begun preparation of an impact plan?

□ No, not relevant

□ No, not yet. Will in the future

□ Yes

What is the current form of the impact plan?

□ Unwritten

□ Informally written

□ Formally prepared

Is the product or service that the new social venture will sell completely developed and ready for sale or delivery?

□ Already sell/deliver the product/service

□ Completed and ready for sale or delivery

□ Prototype/procedure is tested with customers

□ Model/procedure is being developed

□ Still in the idea stage. No work done yet

How would you describe the location where your social venture is being developed?

□ Residence or personal property

□ Special location for social venture

□ Site of existing business

□ Specific location not yet used

□ Other. Please specify:_____

Does this new social venture have a listing in the phone book or a specific email address and/or website?

□ Phone

□ Email and/or website

□ Both

□ Neither

Thinking about the actions you've undertaken so far to launch this new social venture, please answer the following questions.

	No, not relevant	Not yet; Will in the future	Yes
1. Has this new social venture been registered with the appropriate government agency?	1	2	3
2. Does this new social venture carry liability insurance?	1	2	3
3. Have marketing or promotional efforts been started for the product or service offered by this new social venture?	1	2	3
4. Has this new social venture developed any proprietary technology, processes or procedures that no other venture can use?	1	2	3
5. Has an application for a patent, copyright or trademark relevant to this new social venture been submitted?	1	2	3
6. Have any major items like equipment, facilities or property been purchased, leased or rented specifically for this new social venture?	1	2	3
7. Have any raw materials, inventory, supplies or components been purchased specifically for this new social venture?	1	2	3
8. Has an effort been made to talk with potential customers, clients or beneficiaries about the product or service of this new social venture?	1	2	3
9. Has an effort been made to define the market opportunities for this new social venture?	1	2	3
10. Has an effort been made to determine the regulatory requirements for this new social venture, such as operating licenses, permits or health and safety regulations?	1	2	3
11. Have financial institutions or other people been asked for funds for this new social venture?	1	2	3
12. Have you received the first outside funding from financial institutions or other people for this new social venture?	1	2	3

13. Has credit with a supplier been established?	1	2	3
14. Has a bank account already been opened to use exclusively for this new social venture?	1	2	3
15. Has an accountant been retained for this new social venture?	1	2	3
16. Has a lawyer been retained for this new social venture?	1	2	3
17. Has this new social venture become a member of a trade or industry association?	1	2	3

Team involvement questions

How many people are both (co-)founders and managers of this new social venture, including yourself?

_____# of people

How many managers or employees, including exclusive subcontractors, currently work for pay 35 hours or more per week for this new social venture, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees

How many managers or employees, including exclusive subcontractors, currently work for pay fewer than 35 hours per week for this new social venture, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees

How many managers or employees, currently work as volunteers, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees who are beneficiaries
_____# of managers or employees who are not beneficiaries

How many hours per week do you typically work for this new social venture?

☐ Less than 1h   ☐ 31 - 35h   ☐ 66h - 70h
☐ 1h - 5h   ☐ 36 - 40h   ☐ 71h - 75h
☐ 6h - 10h   ☐ 41h - 45h   ☐ 76h - 80h
☐ 11h - 15h   ☐ 46h - 50h   ☐ 81h - 85h
☐ 16h - 20h   ☐ 51h - 55h   ☐ 86h - 90h
☐ 21h - 25h   ☐ 56h - 60h   ☐ More than 90h
☐ 26h - 30h   ☐ 61h - 65h

Demographic questions

What is your sex?

☐ Male   ☐ Female

Which range best describes your age?

☐ 16 - 24
☐ 25 - 34
☐ 35 - 44
☐ 45 - 54
☐ 55 - 64
☐ 65 or over

What is the highest level of education you have attained?

☐ Primary education
☐ Secondary education
☐ Technical or vocational degree
☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Master's degree
☐ Law, MD or PhD degree

What is your current employment status?

☐ Full-time employed
☐ Part-time employed
☐ Self-employed in this new social venture
☐ Self-employed in another venture
☐ Seeking employment
☐ Retired
☐ Unable to work due to disability
☐ Full-time student
☐ Full-time homemaker

What is your primary occupation? If retired, what was your primary

occupation?

_____

How many years of full-time paid work experience do you have?

_____ years

How many years of work experience have you had in the social sector or the industry where the new social venture will operate?

_____ years of work experience in the social sector

_____ years of work experience in the industry

For how many years have you had managerial or supervisory responsibilities?

_____ years

Besides the new social venture, how many ventures with a commercial, social, environmental or community objective have you helped to start as a (co-)founder?

_____ # of commercial ventures

_____ # of social ventures

_____ # of environmental ventures

_____ # of community ventures

Besides the new social venture discussed in this research project, how many other ventures with a commercial, social, environmental or community objective currently do you own?

_____ # of commercial ventures

_____ # of social ventures

_____ # of environmental ventures

_____ # of community ventures

How many members make up your permanent household, including you?

_____ # of members

What is your current marital status or living arrangement?

☐ Married   ☐ Divorced
☐ Living with a partner   ☐ Widowed
☐ Separated   ☐ Single

Which range best describes the total annual income of all the members of your household combined, including your income?

☐ £14 999 and under   ☐ £35 000 - £49 999
☐ £15 000 - £25 999   ☐ £50 000 - £69 999
☐ £26 000 - £34 999   ☐ £70 000 and over

Do you expect this new social venture to contribute to your income?

☐ No.

☐ Yes, I expect it to replace a current source of income.

☐ Yes, I expect it to become an additional source of income.

Appendix B: Venture emergence questions used at T2[4]

Operational status questions

Has this new social venture already received any money, income or fees from the sale of goods or services?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

In what month and year did this new social venture make its first sale?

Date:_____

What percentage of the total income for this social venture comes from the sale of goods or services?

_____%

Has monthly revenue ever exceeded monthly expenses for this new social venture?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Has monthly revenue exceeded monthly expenses for this new social venture for more than 3 consecutive months?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Are salaries for the managers who are also (co)founders included in the computation of monthly expenses?

☐ No   ☐ Partial salary   ☐ Yes

Growth questions

How many managers or employees, including exclusive subcontractors, currently work for pay 35 hours or more per week for this new social venture, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees

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[4] Skip logics excluded for ease of reading.

How many managers or employees, including exclusive subcontractors, currently work for pay fewer than 35 hours per week for this new social venture, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees

How many managers or employees, currently work as volunteers, not counting the (co-)founders?

_____# of managers or employees who are beneficiaries

_____# of managers or employees who are not beneficiaries

Innovation questions

In the past 12 months, did your social venture introduce new or significantly improved products?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Were any of these new products also new to the market?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

In the past 12 months, did your social venture introduce new or significantly improved services?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Were any of these new services also new to the market?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

In the past 12 months, did your social venture introduce new or significantly improved development, manufacturing, delivery or distribution processes?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Were any of these new processes also new to your market?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

Appendix C: Interview topics and questions[5]

1. Introduction
2. Ethics
3. Background: Can you tell me about your social venture, its purpose, and activities? Probe for:
   1. Purpose: social issue, social impact, beneficiaries
   2. Market: offerings, target market, competitive strategy
   3. Revenue generation: sources of revenue, pricing, costs, use of surplus
   4. Future plans and timelines
4. Feedback seeking:
   1. Introduction: As you know, I am interested in seeking feedback, which can be a well planned or a very informal and sometimes unplanned activity to ask beneficiaries, customers, friends, peers, or anyone else about their ideas, opinions, and suggestions. You might have done this while chatting with someone at a networking event or having dinner with the family and asking them for feedback in a very spontaneous way. Or you might have scheduled a meeting with a mentor specifically to ask for feedback.
      1. Thinking about the last two months, when was the last time you asked someone for feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why, how, from whom, about what?]
         1. What made it easy to seek feedback in that case?
         2. What made it difficult to seek feedback in that case?
         3. What did you with the feedback? [Probe for elaboration: how used, why/why not used?]
      2. Can you give me another example from the past two months of seeking feedback in a different situation? [Probe for elaboration: why, when, how, from whom, about what?]
         1. What made it easy to seek feedback in that case?
         2. What made it difficult to seek feedback in that case?

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[5] Full list of questions and topics discussed, which varied in order and emphasis based on the interviewee.

3. What did you with the feedback? [Probe for
   elaboration: how used, why/why not used?]

2. Motivations:

   1. Thinking about these two examples, or any others from the
      past two months, why did you seek feedback? What were
      your reasons?

   2. In what types of situations did you seek feedback in the
      past two months? About what?

   3. What did you aim to gain from seeking feedback?

   4. How is seeking feedback beneficial for you?

   5. How is seeking feedback beneficial for your social
      venture?

3. Challenges and responses:

   1. In the past two months, were there situations in which you
      were reluctant to seek feedback? [Probe for elaboration:
      why/why not, when, about what, from whom?]

   2. What did you do in that situation? How did you seek
      feedback?

   3. Can you give me another example from the past two
      months of a situation in which you were reluctant to seek
      feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why, when, how, from
      whom, about what, how responded?]

   4. In the past two months, were there times in which seeking
      feedback was difficult? [Probe for elaboration: why/why
      not, in what situation, from whom, about what, how
      responded?]

   5. In the past two months, did you have any doubts about
      seeking feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why/why not, in
      what situation, from whom, about what, how responded?]

   6. In the past two months, did you have any regrets about
      seeking feedback? [Probe for elaboration: why/why not, in
      what situation, from whom, about what, how responded?]

   7. Were there situations in the past two months when you
      wanted or considered to seek feedback but decided not

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to? [Probe for elaboration: why/why not, in what situation, about what, from whom, how responded?]

8. Considering the positives and negatives of seeking feedback, how do you decide whether or not to seek feedback? What do you do?

9. How do you deal with situations in which you want to both seek and not seek feedback?

4. Sources of feedback:

1. Thinking about the past two months, who did you seek feedback from most often? Why these individuals?

2. Thinking about the past two months, who did you seek feedback from least often? Why these individuals?

3. Are there certain individuals or groups of individuals you generally find it difficult to seek feedback from? [Probe for elaboration: who, why/why not?]

4. Are there certain individuals or groups of individuals you do not seek feedback from? [Probe for elaboration: who, why/why not?]

5. Methods:

1. Thinking about the past two months, how did you go about seeking feedback? What did you actually do to seek feedback?

2. What media or channels did you use to seek feedback?

3. Do you have any feedback-seeking habits?

5. Closing notes

Appendix D: Developing effective feedback-seeking strategies tool[6]

Developing effective feedback-seeking strategies

This quick guide helps you to check up how healthy your overall feedback seeking strategies are and how to improve them. Read the statements on this page and mark all statements that apply to you in general.

I seek feedback to:
- ☐ Feel more confident in ideas and/or decisions
- ☐ Learn new information, skills, and habits
- ☐ Improve products or services and their marketing
- ☐ Be seen as responsive to the needs of beneficiaries, customers or employees/volunteers
- ☐ Create a sense of ownership and engagement among employees/volunteers
- ☐ Capture testimonials to demonstrate impact

I seek feedback on the topics of:
- ☐ Products or services
- ☐ Types of customers or beneficiaries
- ☐ Revenue generation and financial sustainability
- ☐ Financial management
- ☐ Growth and business development
- ☐ Marketing, sales, branding and PR
- ☐ Health, safety, HR and other legal requirements
- ☐ My abilities and approaches
- ☐ My leadership and people management skills
- ☐ My lifestyle, health and wellbeing
- ☐ Events and networks

Before seeking feedback, I consider how it may:
- ☐ Take time and energy away from other activities
- ☐ Confuse me or damage my confidence
- ☐ Expose my ideas to competing organisations
- ☐ Slow down my decision making and progress
- ☐ Cause negative interactions with family and friends
- ☐ Cause negative interactions with customers or beneficiaries
- ☐ Create an image of vulnerable, insecure or incompetent individual

When it come to seeking feedback, I:
- ☐ Sometimes refrain from or delay seeking feedback
- ☐ Refrain from seeking feedback from certain people
- ☐ Ask different groups of people for feedback on different topics or for different purposes
- ☐ Reach out to people outside of my network for feedback
- ☐ Carefully frame my feedback requests
- ☐ Have mentors, personal advisors, a formal or informal advisory board, or feedback teams
- ☐ Have specific feedback seeking habits or events that occur regularly
- ☐ Have communication channels that allow people to give me feedback on ongoing basis

I seek feedback from:
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Partners
- ☐ Employees
- ☐ Volunteers
- ☐ Mentors
- ☐ Award manager
- ☐ Peers from development initiatives
- ☐ Current customers
- ☐ Potential customers
- ☐ Current beneficiaries
- ☐ Potential beneficiaries
- ☐ Previous co-workers
- ☐ Support organisations
- ☐ Partner organisations
- ☐ Funders and investors
- ☐ Experts and thought leaders
- ☐ Individuals in positions of power
- ☐ Other social entrepreneurs
- ☐ Commercial entrepreneurs
- ☐ Charity leaders
- ☐ Professionals
- ☐ Retired professionals

I seek feedback using:
- ☐ Informal face-to-face meetings
- ☐ Structured one-to-one meetings
- ☐ Open forums and consultations
- ☐ Away days
- ☐ Email
- ☐ General social media platforms
- ☐ Specialised social media platforms
- ☐ Text messages
- ☐ The venture's website
- ☐ My personal website
- ☐ Voting mechanisms
- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Conferences
- ☐ Seminars and workshops
- ☐ Residential learning events
- ☐ Networking events
- ☐ Peer support meetings
- ☐ Activities during service delivery
- ☐ Story boards
- ☐ Rough prototypes
- ☐ Small pilots and trials

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[6] Tool developed and tested with entrepreneurs for a social entrepreneurship support organisation to use in training and website to help social entrepreneurs develop ambidextrous feedback seeking.

Developing effective feedback-seeking strategies

Now that you have checked up on your feedback seeking practices, consider the questions on this page to improve your overall strategies or create entirely new ones.

Include new topics to ask for feedback on.

What are the three topics you seek feedback on least frequently or get the least feedback organically?

Topic 1:

Topic 2:

Topic 3:

Address the barriers to feedback seeking.

Consider what makes it difficult for you to seek feedback. Think about personal blocks such as confidence or public image as well as the negative outcomes for your social venture. List three possible solutions you can implement to address these barriers.

Solution 1:

Solution 2:

Solution 3:

Include new individuals to ask for feedback.

Consider the following five characteristics and identify two new people with each characteristic whom you can ask for feedback. Identify one person you know well and one person who you do not know personally.

	I know well	I don't know
Proximity		
Expertise		
Experience		
Trustworthiness		
In power		

Create serendipity.

Sometimes the best feedback comes from serendipitous interactions. List three new events or initiatives where you can gain meaningful feedback.

Event 1:

Event 2:

Event 3:

Embed feedback seeking in daily activities.

Consider your daily routines, activities and habits in relation to your social venture. List three possible solutions to embed feedback seeking in your daily activities, instead of being a one-off activity.

Solution 1:

Solution 2:
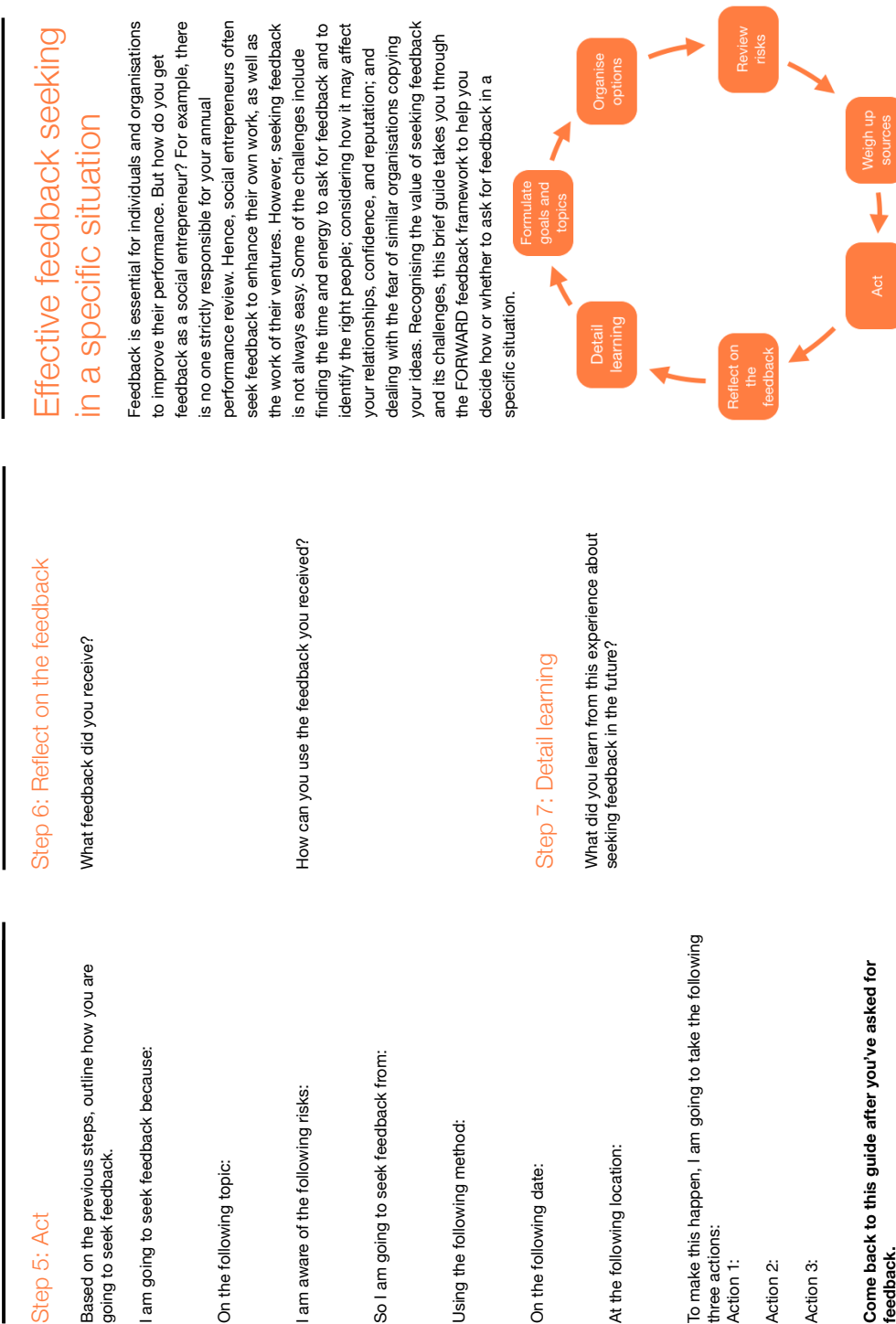
Solution 3:

Take action.

List three specific actions you will take in the next week to implement any of the solutions identified on this page. Set a date for each one to them.

Action 1:

Action 2:

Action 3:

Appendix E: Effective feedback seeking in a specific situation tool[7]

Effective feedback seeking in a specific situation

Feedback is essential for individuals and organisations to improve their performance. But how do you get feedback as a social entrepreneur? For example, there is no one strictly responsible for your annual performance review. Hence, social entrepreneurs often seek feedback to enhance their own work, as well as the work of their ventures. However, seeking feedback is not always easy. Some of the challenges include finding the time and energy to ask for feedback and to identify the right people; considering how it may affect your relationships, confidence, and reputation; and dealing with the fear of similar organisations copying your ideas. Recognising the value of seeking feedback and its challenges, this brief guide takes you through the FORWARD feedback framework to help you decide how or whether to ask for feedback in a specific situation.

- Formulate goals and topics
- Organise options
- Review risks
- Weigh up sources
- Act
- Reflect on the feedback
- Detail learning

Step 6: Reflect on the feedback

What feedback did you receive?

How can you use the feedback you received?

Step 7: Detail learning

What did you learn from this experience about seeking feedback in the future?

Step 5: Act

Based on the previous steps, outline how you are going to seek feedback.

I am going to seek feedback because:

On the following topic:

I am aware of the following risks:

So I am going to seek feedback from:

Using the following method:

On the following date:

At the following location:

To make this happen, I am going to take the following three actions:
Action 1:

Action 2:

Action 3:

Come back to this guide after you've asked for feedback.

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[7] Tool developed and tested with entrepreneurs for a social entrepreneurship support organisation to use in training and website to help social entrepreneurs develop ambidextrous feedback seeking. Tool works as a threefold brochure once folded to guide users through each step.

Step 1: Formulate goals and topics

Why do you want to seek feedback?

What exactly do you want feedback on? Be specific.

Can seeking feedback on this topic have additional benefits for you at the moment? For example, social entrepreneurs seek feedback to feel more confident in their decisions, to learn, to improve their products and services, and to enhance their public image.

Step 2: Organise options

List all alternative ways you can seek feedback.

Step 3: Review risks

How can seeking feedback have a negative impact on you or your social venture?

What obstacles might you face?

Step 4: Weigh up sources

Fill out the matrix to identify individuals to ask for feedback.

Type of person	Name of person
Family member	
Friend	
Partner	
Employee	
Volunteer	
Current customer	
Potential customer	
Current beneficiary	
Potential beneficiary	
Funder/investor	
Previous co-worker	
Support organisation	
Partner organisation	
Expert/thought leader	
Individual in power	
Social entrepreneur	
Commercial entrepreneur	
Charity leader	
(Retired) professional	