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TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK? HOW ENTREPRENEURS MANAGE THE FEEDBACK- SEEKING PARADOX (SUMMARY)

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

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Principal Topic

Interpersonal feedback seeking seems essential for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs seek feedback when innovating (Gemell, Boland & Kolb, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Volery, Mueller & Siemens, 2015) and navigating the uncertainty involved in creating and running new ventures (Sarasvathy, 2001). In such situations seeking feedback involves and attracts first customers (Corner & Wu, 2012) and aids fast strategic decision-making (Eisenhardt, 1989). Given the expected benefits, it is a surprising insight that not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre & Salipante, 2012), which suggests that entrepreneurs may be motivated to both seek and not seek feedback. Therefore, our key research questions are: *Why do and do not entrepreneurs seek feedback?* and *How do entrepreneurs seek feedback in light of these potentially conflicting motivations?*

Method

Given the limited research on these questions, we employed an inductive approach, which is also appropriate for investigating why and how research questions (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with 37 diverse nascent social entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom. In line with inductive theory building approaches, data analysis was conducted iteratively and in parallel to build and refine the emerging second-order themes and aggregated dimensions until we reached theoretical saturation.

Results and Implications

Our findings informed a dynamic model of ambidextrous feedback seeking for venture emergence. The model conceptualises feedback seeking as a personal paradox (Lewis, 2000) of contradictory, yet interrelated drivers. Entrepreneurs seek feedback to pursue development goals: reducing uncertainty, learning, improving offerings, and building reputation. They refrain from seeking feedback to pursue protection goals: conserving resources, maintaining competitiveness, managing relationships, and maintaining reputation. Entrepreneurs respond to the feedback-seeking paradox by engaging in differentiation and integration practices. They differentiate development and protection goals across time, individuals, and content to leverage short-term trade-offs. Entrepreneurs integrate development and protection goals into novel solutions that leverage long-term synergies. An overall ambidextrous approach to both seek and not seek feedback with multiple differentiation and integration practices over time can aid venture emergence. Our model contributes to our understanding of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in significant ways.

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