Determinants of Integrity in Upward Feedback

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated whether the same attributes that cause managers to improve performance following upward feedback also encourage subordinates to give open and honest upward feedback. By proving that these attributes encourage integrity in upward feedback, this research allows organisations to freely implement programmes to increase the desired attributes among employees without fear of jeopardising the desired integrity of the feedback.

Three hundred and twenty eight employees of a prominent South African company gave an indication of the levels of self-efficacy, learning goal orientation, organisational cynicism and integrity of upward feedback in the organisation. Statistical testing carried out on the resulting data then gave an indication of the relationships between the above-mentioned attributes or variables.

It was found that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and upward feedback integrity, a positive relationship between learning goal orientation and upward feedback integrity and a strong negative relationship between organisational cynicism and upward feedback integrity. These results confirm that organisations can promote the attributes of self-efficacy and learning goal orientation in their employees without fear of jeopardising integrity in their upward feedback process. Conversely, the amount of organisational cynicism must be reduced wherever possible as it acts against the upward feedback mechanism.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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David Eames   Date

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1 DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Increasingly, South African companies are making use of performance management systems to ensure their business objectives are being carried out. A part of the process is the upward feedback mechanism which can be a valuable growth aid for managers. Constructive criticism given in the right conditions by subordinates is invaluable in shaping managers and growing future leaders. Unfortunately, in reality, subordinates rarely speak their minds for fear of victimisation, being misunderstood or other reasons discussed later (Tourish, 2005).

Various studies have shown that under certain circumstances upward feedback has a sustained, positive effect on the performance of managers in organisations (Smither, London, Vasipoulos, Reilly, Millsap and Salvemini, 1995; Walker and Smither, 1999). Certain organisational and personal attributes have been identified as desirable in order for managers to best grow and improve performance following feedback. These attributes are high self-efficacy, high learning goal orientation and low organisational cynicism.

Studies show that the upward feedback process is more complicated than first thought and the outcomes can be influenced by any number of factors (Smither, London and Reilly, 2005). Many companies have simply adopted the upward feedback mechanism without fully comprehending the conditions that need to exist in order for it to be

effective. Further research is required in the South African context to understand if the required conditions exist for effective feedback and what specific factors are impeding the process.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

It has been found that a manager's performance increases after receiving upward feedback from subordinates provided the manager's learning orientation is positive (Heslin and Latham, 2004). This indicates that the upward feedback process is valuable and validates the need for it. Other studies have indicated the benefits of upward feedback over time. A study of 238 managers (Smither, *et al*. 1995) showed that managers improved their performance six months after an upward feedback program was implemented.

The upward feedback process is complicated by the manager's reaction to upward feedback. Facteau and Facteau (1998) found that leaders reacted less positively and were less likely to accept the ratings if they were lower. They identified the need for formal mechanisms to force leaders to take action to improve and for organisations to spend time preparing leaders how to react to the ratings.

Research done by Atwater, Waldman, Atwater and Cartier (2000), showed that there is a link between organizational cynicism and the level of improvement of a manager following feedback. Thus, the attitude of the manager is important in the process. Other attitudinal attributes were

identified in the work of Heslin *et al.* (2004) as being beneficial to the process, such as learning goal orientation and self efficacy.

These findings indicate that any organisation that wants to improve the effectiveness of the upward feedback process should focus on encouraging these attributes amongst their management. By increasing the levels of self efficacy, learning goal orientation and decreasing the level of organisational cynicism in management, organisations can ensure that managers are best positioned to take feedback and improve their performance.

These studies all assume, however, that subordinates are giving valuable, constructive, on-the-level feedback. Very little work has gone into understanding or checking the integrity of the feedback that managers receive. While it could be understood, intuitively, why managers will improve their performance following constructive feedback, one should also ask what damage is being caused by managers taking inaccurate, incomplete or over-inflated feedback into account.

It should be remembered that any manager is also going to be the subordinate to another manager (assuming the organization is of hierarchical nature). By encouraging these qualities in managers, organisations would also be encouraging them in subordinates. Before one can blindly begin promoting these attributes in managers it should

be checked whether these attributes still contribute to open and honest feedback from a subordinate to a manager. In other words, is there a positive correlation between the level of these attributes in a person and the integrity of the feedback that person gives to a supervisor? An environment that is extremely performance driven and promotes self-efficacy and learning goal orientation may not be an environment where subordinates feel free to speak out.

Once it has been proven that there isn't a detrimental effect to upward feedback integrity by encouraging these attributes, then organisations can promote the qualities of self efficacy, learning goal orientation and reduce organisational cynicism without fear of actually reducing the effectiveness of the feedback process. Thus, the objective of this research is to confirm a positive correlation between the integrity of feedback given and the levels of self efficacy and learning goal orientation and a negative correlation between the integrity of the feedback given and the level of organisational cynicism.

1.3   Relevance to South Africa

Clearly, these studies highlight the effectiveness of upward feedback under certain conditions. Upward feedback programs appear to require particular conditions to be in place for maximum benefit to occur. The trick is to understand these conditions and re-create them in an upward feedback program. South Africa carries its own unique challenges in

that, due to historical issues, there is little trust between different races and genders.

According to Binedell (2004, p.261), "Throughout the developing world there is a need for management that understands and accepts the roots and values of the culture in which it operates". Here, Nick Binedell was talking about the challenges for management if South Africa is going to be globally competitive. At this stage of South Africa's development it is critical that management talent is identified and nurtured through development schemes and correctly applied human resource practices. Increasing competition from foreign companies as a result of globalisation is placing pressure on operating efficiencies, requiring ever more innovative approaches to problems and competent people to put them into practice.

As companies jostle to become more competitive, human resource practices start to really count. Companies that have more productive employees have an edge over their competitors. This creates scope for trying to understand whether the correct conditions exist in South African companies and whether the attributes of current managers counteract the effectiveness and integrity of upward feedback.

2 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review seeks to understand the upward feedback mechanism and characteristics thereof.   Numerous examples of longitudinal studies are examined which correlate certain attributes and attitudes to performance improvement by managers following upward feedback. By extrapolation (since these studies have been found valid globally), it can be assumed that the same behaviours and attitudes would signal a favourable environment for effective upward feedback in South African companies.

2.1 Context of Upward Feedback

Feedback in organisations can take different forms, namely downward communication, upward communication and lateral communication (Robbins, 2005). Downward communication flows from one level of an organisation to a lower level and examples include memos to employees, instructions and feedback about performance. Upward communication flows in reverse and includes reports, progress communication, communication of problems and feedback on performance of the manager and the organisation (upward feedback).

Upward feedback relates to feedback given by a subordinate to an immediate supervisor. According to Robbins (2005), traditionally, performance has been measured through feedback from a person's superior. The argument for this was that the superior is held responsible for the subordinate's performance and is therefore in the best position to

evaluate it. More recently, however, other sources of evaluation have been found to be more useful:

- Peer evaluations are more reliable since peers are closer to the person and can observe daily how the person behaves and performs. The drawback is that peer evaluations can be biased through friendships or animosity.

- Self-evaluation supports the principles of self-empowerment and management. The use of self-evaluations in a performance appraisal helps the person to buy into the process better since they have some input. Unfortunately, self-evaluation is prone to over-inflation of performance.

- Subordinate evaluation or upward feedback often provides accurate and detailed information about a manager's behaviour and performance. In this case, subordinates are subject to fear of reprisal.

This has led to the development of the 360-degree evaluation whereby evaluations are obtained from each of the above sources including external customers. This provides increased accuracy with regards to the manager's performance (Kets de Vries, Vrignaud and Florent-Treacy, 2004).

2.2 Upward Feedback and Performance Management

Companies use mechanisms like performance appraisals to encourage employees to perform better. For many companies, performance

appraisals form the basis of pay increases or bonuses. Performance appraisals provide a mechanism for observers to respond to other employees' work performance (Atwater, Rousch and Fischthal, 1995).

Since subordinates have direct exposure to a manager's behaviour they are ideally positioned to give feedback on the leader's performance. Subordinate perceptions often give an insightful view of manager's strengths and weaknesses and can highlight undesirable behaviours that leaders are not aware of displaying.

2.3   Benefits of Upward Feedback

2.3.1 Leadership Development

According to Atwater *et al.* (1995), upward feedback is particularly valuable in attempts to develop leaders. The importance of subordinate appraisals becomes apparent when you consider that many leadership behaviours only get witnessed by the manager and the subordinate. Subordinate perceptions about a manager's strengths are valuable to the manager particularly in the case where the manager's perception of those same strengths is different. This would indicate to the manager the need to change behaviours or performance.

2.3.2 Improved Decision Making

Tourish (2005) argues that upward communication is critical for organisations to improve decision making. Senior managers grow out of touch with the mood of the people and may underestimate or miss

emerging problems in the workplace or marketplace. Then, they are more likely to produce strategies that are out of alignment with the perceptions of their employees. This reduces the chances of successful strategic implementation. By simply ensuring a healthy upward feedback climate in an organisation, this will improve and aid the implementation of decisions.

2.3.3 Higher Productivity and Performance

Many studies have found that upward feedback increases managers' performance including: Atwater *et al.* 1995; Johnson and Ferstl, 1999; Smither *et al.* 1995 and Heslin *et al.* 2004. There is a growing trend for managers to get input on their performance from subordinates who are better positioned than the manager's superior to evaluate them. This is particularly true in areas like the behavioural climate that the manager creates and team development. Effective use of the feedback results in a more cohesive team and as a result performance improves.

2.4 Problems with Upward Feedback Integrity

2.4.1 Barriers to Feedback

Barriers to feedback can arise from the inherent imbalance of power, influence and decision making power in that relationship (Lawrence and Wiswell, 1995). Other factors can be:

- Fear of embarrassment or loss of face
- One or both parties may feel that the feedback is unnecessary

- The parties may be in a competitive relationship and are driven to protect their information.

2.4.2 Subordinate Rating Ability

Concerns have been raised about the ability of subordinates to accurately rate their manager's performance (Bernadin, Dahmus and Redmon, 1993). The most often raised concerns of managers about subordinate ratings are the following:

- Managers may be led to please subordinates in an effort to get higher appraisals, resulting in reduced productivity

- Subordinates lack the ability, training or necessary job information to provide valid ratings

- Subordinates may be reluctant to be honest for fear of repercussions

- Subordinates who are being pushed the hardest may rate their managers more harshly

These criticisms, though valid, relate to circumstances that can be managed. In fact, it has been found that subordinates actually have a fairly accurate view of their manager's performance (Mount, 1984). Mount found that subordinate ratings are more highly correlated with supervisor ratings than with self-ratings and have mean values approximately the same as the supervisor ratings. He does point out that multiple subordinate ratings are used which has an averaging effect and results in less deviation from the mean. This has the effect of giving a more "true" picture of the manager's performance.

These findings were corroborated by Waldman and Atwater (2001). In their study they found that upward feedback scores appeared to possess convergent validity in that subordinate ratings were correlated with formal appraisal scores of those managers by their supervisors. Their view is that subordinate ratings should be used for more than just guidance for managers but should be built into performance rating and compensation scales. In their study, they found that subordinates felt that this should be the case while managers, naturally, were reluctant about the idea.

2.4.3 Anonymity

Some researchers have recommended anonymity as a way of avoiding some of the negative reactions to upward feedback (Antonioni, 1994). Antonioni found that subordinates who participated in an anonymous feedback programme gave managers lower ratings than those who participated in an open feedback programme and that subordinates prefer to participate in anonymous feedback while managers prefer to use open feedback.

In further work by Scott and Rains, 2005, they came up with seven explanation types of why anonymity was preferred in organisational communications, namely:

- Avoidance of personal retribution
- Peoples discomfort with confrontation
- Communication of sensitive issues
- Protection of others

- Promotion of honesty and openness

- Need to identify

- Recreational

2.4.4 Ingratiation

According to Tourish (2005), employees are often reluctant to transmit negative information upwards because they recognise that the hostile reaction of recipients may endanger their standing and possibly damage their careers. This leads to the ingratiation effect whereby employees tend to agree with the opinions of superiors.

2.4.5 Inability to Give Criticism

This is one of the major problems cited by Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield (2006) about giving feedback. The person giving the feedback may have difficulty giving criticism and the person receiving the feedback may have a problem accepting criticism even if the criticism is given diplomatically and with sensitivity. This would result in feedback that is not entirely truthful as the person giving the feedback may hold back or neglect to bring up a critical issue.

2.4.6 Personality Bias

Another problem cited by Grobler *et al.* (2006) is that of personality biases. Feedback should focus on task related issues as opposed to personality or behaviour related issues. People can tend to get carried away with the psychologist role and try to change the person's

personality. This type of approach can only lead to deterioration in the conversation and in one or the other person becoming defensive.

2.5 Upward Feedback and Improvement in Managers' Performance

Many longitudinal studies have been conducted on this phenomenon, most notably the work by Smither *et al.* (1995) showed that managers improved their performance 6 months after an upward feedback program was implemented. Their results came from a study of 238 managers. Their findings were that managers whose initial performance was rated as moderate to low improved by 0.25 to 0.4 standard deviation units and this improvement could not be attributed solely to regression to the mean. Disappointing results were recorded for managers who received high performance ratings. This is attributed to the differences in self and other ratings (see next section).

Another study tried to determine whether improvements could be sustained over a longer period of time (Walker *et al.* 1999). This study was conducted over a five year period and again showed performance improvements over the five years especially for those managers who initially received poor performance ratings.

2.6 The Effect of Differences in Self and Other Ratings

Other characteristics observed by Smither *et al.* (1995) and Atwater *et al.* (1995) were that the degree of performance improvement depended on the difference between the manager's self rating and that of the

subordinates. In these studies, the manager had to complete a self-assessment of their performance. It was found that if a manager had a lower self-rating than that given by subordinates, then by the next measurement they had adjusted their self-assessment upwards without any significant change in subordinate rating. If a manager had a self-rating that was more or less the same as their subordinate rating, then neither their self rating nor their behaviour had changed by the next measurement. If a manager had a rating that was more than that given by subordinates, then by the next measurement they had decreased their self-rating and simultaneously increased their performance.

2.7 Factors Affecting Performance Improvement Following Feedback

2.7.1 A Theoretical Framework

Recent work by Smither, *et al*. 2005 led to the development of a theoretical framework (see next page) that describes the different factors most likely to have an impact on performance improvement following multi-source feedback. These factors were identified after a comprehensive meta-analysis using the results of twenty four longitudinal studies of performance improvement following multisource feedback.
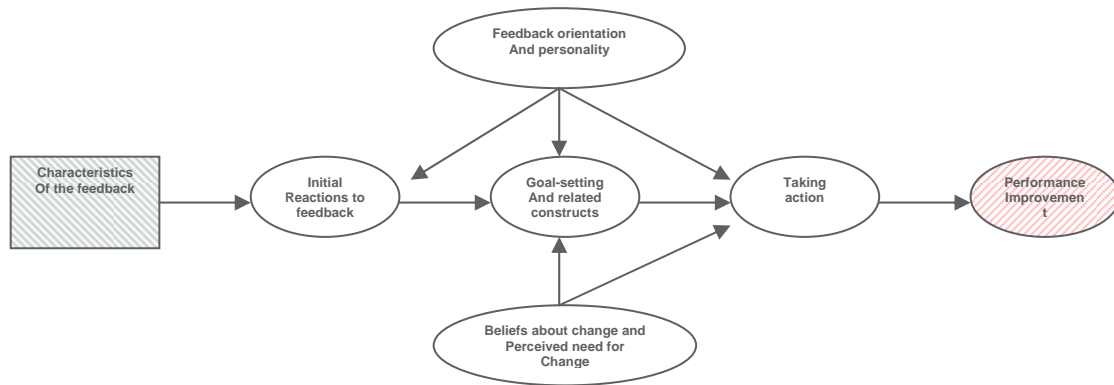
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Factors Affecting Performance Improvement Following Feedback

In the above model developed by Smither, *et* al. (2005), the authors conclude that improvement of performance following feedback is most likely to occur when feedback indicates that change is necessary, recipients have a positive feedback orientation, perceive a need to change their behaviour, react positively to the feedback, believe change is feasible, set appropriate goals to regulate their behaviour and take actions that lead to skill and performance improvement.

2.7.2 Characteristics of Feedback

2.7.2.1 Positive versus Negative Feedback

Smither and Walker (2004) investigated the effects of negative versus positive feedback. In their findings, they conclude that feedback recipients who receive a lot of negative feedback actually decline in performance, possibly due to the person becoming discouraged or overwhelmed. In contrast, they found that feedback recipients who receive a small amount of negative feedback improved more than other managers. This is consistent with the findings of Smither *et al.* (1995). In general, managers who received positive comments improved more than managers who received negative comments.

2.7.2.2   Self-other Differences

In the theoretical model developed by Smither, *et al.* (2005), descriptives that describe the feedback like positive feedback or negative feedback relate to the characteristics of the feedback (first block).   Another characteristic of feedback found to be relevant by these researchers was the self-other rating difference.   In other words, the difference between the rating managers would give themselves and the rating subordinates would give them.

2.7.3 *Managers' Attitude to Feedback*

The study of Smither *et al.* (1995) also validated the self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970) which showed that people will seek to reduce the gap between their own rating of their performance and the feedback of someone else.   Should the gap be negligible, the manager may not be motivated to change their performance even if both ratings are unfavourable.

Of particular interest is the fact that managers will react to feedback depending the rating itself.   Another longitudinal study by Facteau *et al.* (1998) found that managers will react less favourably to ratings that are lower and that their acceptance of those ratings also decreases the lower the rating.   It is clear that manager's attitudes and their acceptance of the rating are key to effective upward feedback.   This finding is backed up by Atwater *et al.* (2000) who found that individual's attitudes appear to be relevant to behaviour change following upward feedback.

Relating this to the theoretical model developed by Smither, *et al.* (2005), they talk about the recipient's feedback orientation and personality. These affect how the recipient will react to the feedback and whether the person will translate that feedback into action. A person with a high feedback orientation is more likely to seek and evaluate feedback and feel accountable to use it to become more effective.

2.7.4 Self-efficacy

High self-efficacy basically relates to a high assurance in ones abilities and the belief that one can manage end effect change. According to Bandura (1991), people with high perceived self-efficacy, approach tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. They take a deep interest in whatever they do and concentrate on the task at hand. Their outlook increases self-motivation and reduces stress and vulnerability to depression.

In this context it would relate to a manager being able to take negative feedback and translate that into a positive change. Work done by Heslin *et al.* (2004) showed that there is a relationship between managers who have high self-efficacy and performance improvements following upward feedback. Managers with high self-efficacy interpreted the feedback effectively and increased their performance whereas managers with low self-efficacy used the information ineffectively.

Smither, *et al.* (2005) groups the concept of self-efficacy in the block called "beliefs about change" in their theoretical model. They comment that even if feedback recipients receive feedback and accept it, it does not necessarily mean that they will change their behaviour. This sort of person has low self-efficacy and would not exert any effort to change because they might not believe that change is possible or even that it will result in a favourable outcome.

2.7.5 Goal Orientation

Van de Walle, Cron and Slocum (2001) describe a three factor model of goal orientation. They differentiate between a learning goal orientation, a proving goal orientation and an avoiding goal orientation. The learning goal orientation applies to a person who focuses on acquiring new skills and learning from experience. A proving goal orientation applies to a person who focuses on demonstrating competence and looking favourable to other people. Lastly, an avoiding goal orientation applies to a person who avoids negative outcomes and negative judgements from others. In their research they found a positive relationship between learning goal orientation and goal setting, self-efficacy and performance. On the other hand avoiding goal orientation was negatively related to these same factors.

2.7.5.1　Learning Goal Orientation

Another result of the study by Heslin *et al.* (2004) was that managers with a learning goal orientation were more likely to improve their performance following upward feedback. A learning goal orientation is the extent to which a person seeks to learn new competencies in a task.

In this context it relates to a manager who is prepared to adapt their behaviour following upward feedback in order to improve.

In a further study linking performance improvement in managers to goal setting theory (Reilly, Smither and Vasipoulos, 1996), the authors contend that managers internalise their own goals in relation to their feedback and improve based on that. Their findings corroborate this, although they are not sure whether managers seek to minimise the discrepancy between their feedback and self-ratings, data from peers or some other individually established standard.

This is shown in the theoretical model by Smither, *et al.* (2005), in the block called "Goal setting and related constructs". The goals set in response to feedback are the cause of behaviour change and not the feedback itself. Thus people who are more inclined to set goals will be more likely to change their behaviour following feedback.

2.7.6 Organisational Cynicism

It has been found that the amount of management performance improvement can be related to the amount of organisational cynicism that exists (Atwater *et al.* 2000). Organisational cynicism was identified as a growing phenomenon by earlier work on the subject by Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar (1998). If there is a belief by the individual that the organisation lacks integrity, fairness, and honesty then the individual will have a tendency towards saying negative things and behaving negatively. This individual will also be an unwilling participant (apathetic)

in processes that the organisation believes are important and may even extend to sabotage.

In their meta-analysis of multi-source feedback, Smither *et al.* (2005) also drew a link with organisational cynicism. They conclude that it is reasonable to expect that cynics would question the value of setting goals to improve their performance following feedback.

2.7.7 Use of the Feedback

The reactions of people to feedback and their attitude towards feedback are important factors that lead to behaviour change. Ultimately, if no action is taken after the feedback process, then there is no point in seeking feedback. In their theoretical model, Smither, *et al.* (2005), stress that steps like seeking coaching, clarifying feedback and setting goals are necessary for performance improvement.

A study by Walker *et al.* (1999) found that over a five year period, managers who met with their direct reports to discuss their upward feedback improved more than those who didn't and there was also a better improvement where managers discussed previous year's feedback with their direct reports. Managers who meet with their subordinates to discuss the feedback had better opportunities to clarify any comments and receive suggestions on performance improvement.

Walker *et al.* (1999) suggest that subordinates who are aware of their manager's developmental goals may feel empowered to continue giving

feedback and could be more forgiving of mistakes made by a manager because they understand the intent that underlies their behaviour. Also, when a subordinate knows that there will be a discussion they are forced to think deeply about their feedback and put it in a constructive way.

One study looked at the use of an executive coach (Luthans and Peterson, 2003) for twenty managers who received multi-source feedback. They found that the self-ratings of managers stayed the same over the period of three months but that the ratings of others improved following the coaching intervention. In this study, the authors recommend the use of coaching as part of a feedback system that will, they suggest, lead to improved production quality, customer service and/or revenues.

2.8 Literature Conclusion

A leading specialist in organisational behaviour and leadership stated, "Effective organisational functioning demands that people have a healthy disrespect for their boss, feel free to express emotions and opinions openly, and are comfortable engaging in banter and give and take" (De Vries, 2001, p.94). In essence this is the environment that upward feedback is meant to achieve. As the literature indicates, this concept while simple in nature is complex to put into practise. The benefits include leadership development, improved decision making and higher productivity and performance.

Studies have shown that sustained improvement in management performance can be achieved through the use of a proper upward feedback process, however many conditions need to be in place for it to be effective. Managers react best to a difference between their own performance rating and that of their subordinates. Factors that affect the manager's use of the feedback include the manager's attitude, characteristics of the feedback, how the feedback is used, manager's level of organisational cynicism, manager's learning goal orientation and manager's level of self-efficacy.

The process is not without its problems; namely, feedback is subject to the effects of ingratiation, the subordinate's ability to give criticism (especially to a superior) and personality bias, all of which can make the integrity of the feedback slightly suspect. While creating the environment where managers get the most benefit out of the process, organisations may be compromising on feedback integrity. This requires some investigation into whether the same conditions that improve manager's performance also improve the integrity of feedback that managers act upon.

3   RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

From the research it appears that upward feedback can improve performance but only under the right conditions. It requires that the manager possess certain qualities and have the right attitude towards the process in order for the most benefit to occur. The literature shows that high levels of self efficacy and learning goal orientation coupled with low organisational cynicism create the best conditions for performance improvement.

Simply encouraging these behaviours in organisations could prove to be foolhardy as these same behaviours might be counterproductive to the integrity of the feedback that is given. First, it needs to be established whether the same behaviours that encourage managers to improve performance following feedback also encourage subordinates to give open and honest feedback (feedback integrity). For instance, an environment that is highly performance driven and encourages learning goal orientation may not be an environment conducive for subordinates to speak their mind.

It has been shown that high levels of self-efficacy would lead a manager to improve performance following upward feedback (Heslin *et al.* 2004). This raises the first hypothesis:

- $H1_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated positively with self-efficacy in the feedback giver.

Another factor contributing to the performance improvement of managers is their level of learning goal orientation. Managers with a high learning goal orientation are more inclined to tackle negative feedback with concrete plans to improve. This leads to the next hypothesis:

- $H2_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated positively with learning goal orientation in the feedback giver.

Previous longitudinal studies have indicated that better performance improvement can be expected where the manager's "organisational cynicism" is low (Atwater, *et al.* 2000). This raises the proposition:

- $H3_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated negatively with organisational cynicism in the feedback giver.

Once it has been established that these relationships exist as per the hypotheses then it can be concluded that the encouragement of these behaviours in an organisation is not going to detract from the integrity of feedback that managers are receiving from subordinates. Managers can then safely assume that the feedback they are receiving has a certain level of integrity and is safe to act upon. This research adds to the knowledge around the characteristics of feedback as proposed by Smither, *et al.* (2005) in their theoretical model.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Research Methodology

This research centres on the environment faced by employees in a prominent South African company, The South African Breweries Ltd. (SAB), and the attributes or attitudes of these employees. This company has used the upward feedback mechanism for over 15 years as part of a performance management process. Since the process is entrenched, this organisation provides the ideal testing ground for establishing whether a link exists between the desired attributes and feedback integrity.

This was non-experimental research exploring the conditions and attitudes found in SAB and comparing them to the conditions necessary for upward feedback integrity as established by previous studies. The research method was quantitative and took the format of a questionnaire. Questionnaires are considered suitable measuring instruments for obtaining information from respondents about attitudes, opinions or beliefs (Welman and Kruger, 2001).

A 5 point Likert scale was used so that answers could be aggregated and sub-samples analysed. The questionnaire was sent out to all employees who have exposure to the upward feedback process in the Sales and Distribution (S&D) division of SAB for completion.

4.2 Population of Relevance

The population of relevance in this study consists of all employees at SAB who have exposure to upward feedback. This relates to all employees on a grade of D or above according to the company's grading system. Using this population, the units of analysis are the employees of grade D and above. It was felt that these employees would be best positioned to be objective about the questionnaire and since they are involved in the upward feedback process, their attributes and attitudes are relevant to the performance improvement aspect of upward feedback.

Since each division of SAB reports into the same executive structure and the same performance management and human resource practices are used across the business it was felt that the sampling frame could concentrate on one division without losing any integrity of data. This represents a non-probability, purposive sampling approach in that the researcher was of the opinion that the sampling frame was still representative of the population (Welman *et al.* 2001). This conclusion was drawn based on the researcher's personal experience at the company. This changes the units of analysis to be all employees at grade D or above who work in the Sales and Distribution (S&D) division of SAB. It is a non-probability approach because not all units of the population (SAB) have the same probability of being sampled.

The request to complete the questionnaire was sent out to all employees in the S&D division of SAB of grade D and above. The total population in this case was 1343 employees. A response rate of 24% resulted in the collection of 328 responses. Unfortunately, not every respondent answered every question resulting in 280 complete responses. This is believed to be due to the reliability of the website on which the questionnaire was hosted. The fall-off of respondents occurs at the end of each webpage of which there were four indicating that the respondents were having trouble connecting to the next page as opposed to respondents just abandoning the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the responses collected were enough to measure each attribute across the organisation with statistical accuracy.

4.3 Data Collection

Specific questions were asked of respondents in order to give an indication of the levels of the following attributes:

- Organisational cynicism
- Self-efficacy
- Learning goal orientation
- Self perceived integrity of upward feedback

(See appendix A for Item scales).

The nature of the questionnaire is extremely personal and in order to limit the effect of measurement reactivity, respondents had to feel that they had complete anonymity. For this reason the questionnaire was set

up on an independent website so that respondents were assured of confidentiality. Since the study did not require any differentiation between units around strata (E.g. gender, race), the only nominal data that was collected was job grade and location. The purpose of collecting this nominal data was not for analysis but rather for the researcher to pinpoint where the responses were coming from. This helped, during the collection of responses, to pinpoint which location and grade were not responding and apply some pressure in that direction.

4.4 Questionnaire Formulation

This study uses a correlational design in order to establish the relationships between the variables being measured in a single group of units of analysis. The variables being measured are self-efficacy, learning goal orientation, organisational cynicism and self-perceived integrity of upward feedback. The questions that relate to each measured variable were mixed up so as not to indicate to the user what was being measured in each section, except the last section that measured the self-perceived integrity of upward feedback. This approach attempted to alleviate the subject affect whereby subjects answer questions based on their awareness of what the expected answer is for each question.

4.4.1 Variables

4.4.1.1 Self-efficacy

Over the years many studies have used the self-efficacy scales originally developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1981. This twenty item scale

was reduced later to ten items (Schwarzer, 1993). The instrument is reliable and has been proven valid in terms of convergent and discriminant validity. The author maintains that the instrument has construct validity across fourteen tested languages and is a universal construct. All ten items from this scale were included in the questionnaire and were used to test hypothesis 1.

4.4.1.2 Learning Goal Orientation

For this construct, the item scales come from an instrument developed by Van De Walle (1997). Van de Walle developed an instrument to measure a three dimensional construct of goal orientation, namely: learning, proving and avoiding goal orientation. Reliability analysis conducted on the instrument revealed an alpha of 0.88 for learning goal orientation. The scale items for learning goal orientation were used to test hypothesis 2.

4.4.1.3 Organisational Cynicism

Organisational cynicism has been measured extensively in work by other researchers (Dean *et al.* 1998). In a later piece of work by Dean, Brandes and Dharwadker (1999), they recommend means of measuring organisational cynicism. The scale items proposed by their study were tested in their research and found to be robust. Ten items out of their fourteen items were found to be suitable for this measurement instrument and included. The items discarded related to their specific study and were not relevant in this case. The remaining items were adapted to fit the current organization under study and were used to test hypothesis 3.

4.4.1.4   Upward Feedback Integrity

The construct for Upward Feedback Integrity was developed by the researcher in consultation with the supervisor for this research. It is made up of the following indicators:

- Extent of hesitance by the subordinate to give critical feedback

- Extent to which a criticism by the subordinate is moderated

- Extent to which the subordinate mentions all the issues on his/her mind

- Extent of acquiescence of the subordinate

- Extent to which criticism is behaviour as opposed to task related

- Extent to which feedback is more positive than negative

- Extent to which the subordinate fears negative consequences from speaking out

- Extent to which the subordinate finds it difficult to express criticism

- Extent to which anonymity would have changed the feedback given

- Extent to which the subordinate believes the feedback will be used

4.4.2 Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

Although this questionnaire wasn't taken through a rigorous process of testing in order to ascertain its validity and reliability in measuring the required constructs prior to the study, certain precautions were taken to ensure the measuring instrument was as accurate as possible under the circumstances of this research.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample of respondents who came from the target population. This was done to reduce the possibility of ambiguity in questions, understand the reactions of respondents to the questions and their interpretations. The questionnaire was also scrutinised by the Professor who supervised this research to gain a professional opinion on its validity and to identify possible flaws.

Wherever possible, work done by previous researchers on measuring these constructs was used so long as their research could show a reliable measure of validity in measuring the constructs. In the case of upward feedback integrity, this wasn't possible as it hasn't been researched previously in any detail. Extensive consultation was utilised in the development of this particular construct and the researcher had a reasonable level of certainty that it possessed validity prior to the study.

4.5 Pre-Testing

Once the questionnaire had been formulated it was tested on a small sample of the target population. The respondents were asked to record separately what their thoughts were on each question. Specifically, the researcher was looking for respondent reactions and mistakes in the questionnaire as well as confusion on the part of the respondents that might indicate ambiguity. The respondents did not record any adverse reactions to the questions although they identified a couple of mistakes (See Appendix B for pre-test feedback). Most notably the respondents identified questions which looked very similar and questioned why they

should have to answer the same question twice. This prompted a re-ordering of the questions so that similar questions were not so noticeable.

4.6 Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires was downloaded from the website in a format that allowed statistical analysis. Descriptive analysis was carried out in order to understand the sample of respondents and whether the sample was representative of the population. The questions relating to each factor were grouped together and analysed in terms of means and standard deviations of the factor as a whole as well as by individual question in order to understand how the respondents measured up in terms of the individual factors. The data was also checked for completeness and validity in each case to ensure that a representative view was being obtained.

Reliability analysis was then carried out on each section of the questionnaire that measured a particular variable to try and understand the extent to which the questions used in each case described the variable being measured. This allowed the researcher to determine whether the questionnaire was reliable in measuring the required variables. Factor analysis was then carried out to try and determine the extent to which one variable was being measured in each case. The factor analysis checks whether the respondents see the variable as

one factor or whether it could be broken down into further distinct variables based on the responses to the questions (Statsoft, 2004).

Having established the reliability of the measuring instrument and the validity of the constructs being measured, the researcher then looked at the relationships between the variables being measured. This was done by performing a One Way Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) test. This allowed the researcher to examine if there was a significant correlation between the variables being measured. A statistically significant difference between the means of the variables being measured indicates a poor correlation. A significant correlation indicates a relationship between the variables, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the hypotheses that were established from the literature review.

The ANOVA test was done between the following variable sets:

- Self reported integrity of upward feedback and self-efficacy
- Self reported integrity of upward feedback and learning goal orientation
- Self reported integrity of upward feedback and organisational cynicism
- Organisational cynicism and learning goal orientation
- Organisational cynicism and Self-efficacy
- Self-efficacy and learning goal orientation

4.7   Research Limitations

As with all research, if one group is under-represented the results may not be an accurate representation of the population. The mix of representation is dependent on the respondents that replied. Because a purposive sampling approach was used, the results obtained for the S&D division of this company may not be representative of the entire company. In this case, the researcher felt that the sampling frame was representative of the population based on previous experience. In any case, the size of the final sample was large enough to mitigate this risk.

Also, Because of the nature of the research, a certain amount of measurement reactivity may have entered the research. Because participants were aware they were completing a questionnaire about their attitudes and behaviours they might have been tempted to answer in way that they felt was expected, as opposed to their actual attitudes and behaviours. The use of a 5 point likert scale allows for a neutral response. In the case of a more sensitive question, this allows the respondent to answer without taking a position. This means that the mean will tend towards the neutral position for these questions and a slightly skewed result may be obtained.

Another limitation of this research is that is confined to one company and may reflect the culture of the company rather than the attitudes and behaviours of managers in general. Having said this, however, human resource practices should have the same dimensions regardless of the

company they are practised in since they deal with human nature. Since this company operates in many countries, it would be inaccurate to extrapolate these findings across the entire company but certainly one could extrapolate across the South African division. This is especially true since the company operates in all parts of the country.

The research relies on self-reported integrity as a construct and this raises some concerns. Respondents may succumb to the subject effect and answer questions in the way they think is the right way as opposed to honestly. To counteract this, as much anonymity as possible was built into the data gathering process. Internal validity of the construct was not been proven prior to the research data being collected. In addition, the construct measures self-reported integrity of upward feedback which may be a different thing to actual integrity of upward feedback. Within the constraints of this study, and in the interests of brevity, self reported integrity of upward feedback shall be referred to as integrity of upward feedback.

The reliability of the website used to host the questionnaire, led to a number of incomplete responses. This had the effect of losing a certain number of respondents for each new page of questions. This meant that the section which measured the self-perceived integrity of upward feedback had the least number of responses as it was located on the last page. Nevertheless, the number of responses collected was significant enough to draw conclusions. For the measurement of the other three

variables, it helped that the questions were scrambled, as respondents were able to answer more questions relating to each variable before losing their connection to the questionnaire.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The S&D division of SAB is spread across five regions as indicated on the table below. A good spread of responses was obtained across all regions indicating a representative sample of the division. Three hundred and twenty eight responses were obtained from a total population of 1343 representing a response rate of 24%. In each region, it can be seen that a representative sample was also obtained as a response rate above 20% was obtained (See Appendix C for detailed descriptive statistics).

Table 1: Frequency by Region

Region

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	**North**	73	22.3
	Egoli	69	21
	Central	54	16.5
	East Coast	66	20.1
	Cape	66	20.1
	Total	328	100

It is also important to determine whether a representative sample has been obtained across all levels of the organisation. The following table indicates that this has been achieved.

Table 2: Frequency by Grade Level

Grade

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	**A-F**	179	54.6
	PE	48	14.6
	OE	58	17.7
	FA (old grade Exec)	43	13.1
	Total	328	100

Although the majority of responses came from respondents in the A-F grade range, this grade range represents a significant percentage of the population and this result was expected (20% response rate). The higher grade levels were surprising as the response rate for grade OE and PE combined was 40% and the rate for grade level FA (Executive) was 53.8%. This is a good result as it means that a good proportion of the upper level employees responded.

The following table sorts the respondents into their region and grade level, showing clearly that it would be difficult to do analysis by grade and by region with any degree of accuracy since there aren't enough respondents except in the A-F grade band. This has no material effect on this research as grade and region play no part in the hypotheses. Rather it talks to the representative ness of the sample, showing a good spread between units of analysis.

Table 3: Frequency by Region and by Grade Level
Region * Grade Cross tabulation

			Grade				Total
			A-F	PE (old grade G)	OE (old grade H/I)	FA (old grade Exec)	
Region	North	Count	36	11	17	9	73
		% of Total	11.00%	3.40%	5.20%	2.70%	22.30%
	Egoli	Count	32	11	16	10	69
		% of Total	9.80%	3.40%	4.90%	3.00%	21.00%
	Central	Count	37	6	6	5	54
		% of Total	11.30%	1.80%	1.80%	1.50%	16.50%
	East Coast	Count	37	11	8	10	66
		% of Total	11.30%	3.40%	2.40%	3.00%	20.10%
	Cape	Count	37	9	11	9	66
		% of Total	11.30%	2.70%	3.40%	2.70%	20.10%
Total		Count	179	48	58	43	328
		% of Total	54.60%	14.60%	17.70%	13.10%	100.00%

The responses of all employees were collated and summarized in the table below. Most significant is the result for learning goal orientation, having a mean of 4.3 which is high, while the Integrity of Upward Feedback variable shows the highest standard deviation. A low score on organisational cynicism corresponds to a low level of this variable.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew ness	Kurtosis
	Missing				
Self-efficacy	48	3.9904	0.45995	-0.211	0.049
Learning goal orientation	48	4.3057	0.45998	-0.253	-0.501
Organisational Cynicism	48	2.6482	0.6837	0.409	-0.066
Integrity of UF	63	3.3505	0.93198	-0.236	-0.494

The following table describes the levels of self-efficacy across all the respondents. Using a likert scale from 1 to 5 on the following questions, an overall score was obtained which indicates that the levels of self-efficacy are relatively high. The highest mean came from the question, "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort", indicating a "can do" attitude. The lowest mean came from the question, "If someone opposes me, I can find means and ways to get what I want". For all questions, responses indicate a relatively high mean of around four with fairly low standard deviations. A negative skew ness on all questions indicates simply that the distribution of the responses lies to the right of the neutral axis as expected.

Table 5: Statistics for Self-Efficacy Item Scales

Statistics for Self-efficacy Item Scales

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew ness	Kurtosis
	Valid	Missing				
(1) 10. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	295	33	4.2	0.692	-0.841	1.383
(2) 15. If someone opposes me I can find means and ways to get what I want	295	33	3.47	0.895	-0.376	-0.152
(3) 5. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	328	0	3.69	0.952	-0.648	-0.163
(4) 19. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	280	48	4.11	0.567	-0.459	2.106
(5) 23. Thanks to my resourcefulness I know how to handle unforeseen situations	280	48	4.12	0.622	-0.628	2.325
(6) 7. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	328	0	4.27	0.728	-1.096	1.948
(7) 13. I remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	294	34	4.11	0.804	-0.921	0.984
(8) 8. When I am confronted with a problem I can usually find several solutions	295	33	4.02	0.677	-1.021	2.306
(9) 17. If I am in trouble I can usually think of something to do	280	48	3.85	0.798	-0.917	0.961
(10) 25. No matter what comes my way, I'm usually able to handle it	280	48	4.05	0.654	-0.593	1.202

The following table shows the results across all respondents to the items scales for learning goal orientation. There were only five questions to measure this construct and it can be seen that respondents indicated a high level of learning goal orientation with a mean on most questions of well above four. The highest mean came from the question, "I am willing to take on a challenging work assignment that I can learn from". Again, fairly low standard deviations were observed for all questions.

Table 6: Statistics for Learning Goal Orientation Item Scales

Statistics for Learning Goal Orientation Item Scales

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew ness	Kurtosis
	Valid	Missing				
(11) 22. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge	280	48	4.29	0.603	-0.229	-0.597
(12) 1. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills	328	0	4.41	0.788	-2.069	6.322
(13) 3. For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks	328	0	3.99	0.811	-1.057	2.019
(14) 14. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent	295	33	4.33	0.636	-0.65	0.58
(15) 12. I am willing to take on a challenging work assignment that I can learn from	295	33	4.48	0.546	-0.354	-1.01

40

The following table shows the results across all respondents to the item scales for organisational cynicism. In this case, a low score indicates a low level of organisational cynicism. The lowest mean occurred with the item, "I find myself mocking my organisation's slogans and initiatives", while the highest occurred with the item, "I often talk with others about the way things are run at my organisation".

This section showed a higher standard deviation than any of the preceding sections indicating a spread of responses. The kurtosis being negative on a number of questions also indicates a flatter distribution of responses. Of interest are questions 22 and 23 which have high means while the remainder of the questions have means of around three or below.

Table 7: Statistics for Organisational Cynicism Item Scales
Statistics for Organisational Cynicism Item Scales

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew ness	Kurtosis
	Valid	Missing				
(16) 21. I believe that my organisation says one thing and does another.	280	48	2.35	1.106	0.658	-0.334
(17) 20. My organisation's policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common.	280	48	2.21	1.037	0.703	-0.199
(18) 2. When my organisation says its going to do something, I wonder if it will really happen.	328	0	2.7	1.146	0.139	-1.033
(19) 9. My organisation expects one thing of its employees, but it rewards another.	295	33	3.03	1.066	0.031	-0.878
(20) 4. I see little similarity between what my organisation says it will do and what it actually does.	328	0	2.59	1.135	0.366	-0.774
(21)18. I complain about how things happen at my organisation to friends outside the organization.	280	48	2.31	1.117	0.691	-0.328
(22) 16. I exchange 'knowing' glances with co-workers	295	33	3.46	0.995	-0.485	-0.276
(23) 6. I often talk to others about the ways things are run at my organisation.	328	0	3.73	1.024	-0.829	0.19
(24) 24. I criticize my organisation's practices and policies with others.	280	48	2.16	1.056	0.749	-0.21
(25) 11. I find myself mocking my organisation's slogans and initiatives.	295	33	2.01	1.047	1.062	0.651

The following table shows the results across all respondents for the item scales measuring self-perceived integrity of upward feedback. Here the response choices were changed to "Always", "Often", "Sometimes", "Once or twice" and "never" corresponding to 1 to 5 respectively. Thus, a high mean here would indicate better integrity of feedback. The highest mean occurred with the item, "When I give upward feedback it is more about my supervisor's personality than behaviour or task related", while the lowest occurred with the item, "If upward feedback were completely anonymous, I would have more to say".

This section had the highest standard deviations of all and a high negative kurtosis, indicating an even spread of responses across the questions. This could have been caused by the choice of response allowed. There was no neutral response in this section, mitigating the effect of respondents not willing to take a position.

Table 8: Statistics for Upward Feedback Integrity Item Scales
Statistics for Upward Feedback Integrity Item Scales

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skew ness	Kurtosis
	Valid	Missing				
(26) 26. I hesitate to give critical upward feedback to my supervisor	265	63	3.43	1.173	-0.174	-0.796
(27) 27. When I give critical upward feedback I try and make it sound like less of a problem than it is	265	63	3.2	1.305	-0.029	-1.084
(28) 28. When I give critical upward feedback I hold back on telling my supervisor everything that bothers me	265	63	3.38	1.301	-0.296	-0.991
(29) 29. I tend to agree with my supervisor's opinion and views even if I'm not completely convinced	265	63	3.51	1.132	-0.38	-0.579
(30) 30. When I give upward feedback , it is more about my supervisor's personality than behaviour or task related	265	63	4	1.177	-0.8	-0.579

(31) 31. I get the feeling that if I am very open in upward feedback it could be detrimental	265	63	3.25	1.323	-0.168	-1.051
(32) 32. If my upward feedback were completely anonymous, I would have more to say	265	63	2.93	1.484	0.124	-1.352
(33) 33. I feel that my upward feedback is not really going to be used for anything	264	64	3.09	1.322	-0.049	-1.026

5.2 Reliability

While the item scales used to measure self-efficacy, learning goal orientation and organisational cynicism have been shown in other studies to be reliable, their reliability was re-tested with this sample of respondents. Of particular interest to the researcher was the reliability of the item scale used to measure self-perceived integrity of upward feedback, since this scale has not been tested before. The reliability test looks at the correlation between the respective items that make up the score relative to the variances of the items (See Appendix D for detailed reliability results).

Table 9: Results of Reliability Test for Self-efficacy Scale

Reliability of Self-efficacy Scale

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	0.816	10

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(1) 10. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	0.559	0.794
(2) 15. If someone opposes me I can find means and ways to get what I want	0.396	0.814
(3) 5. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	0.426	0.811
(4) 19. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	0.57	0.796
(5) 23. Thanks to my resourcefulness I know how to handle unforeseen situations	0.571	0.794
(6) 7. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	0.488	0.801
(7) 13. I remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	0.523	0.797
(8) 8. When I am confronted with a problem I can usually find several solutions	0.591	0.791
(9) 17. If I am in trouble I can usually think of something to do	0.42	0.809
(10) 25. No matter what comes my way, I'm usually able to handle it	0.571	0.794

The preceding table shows that with ten items in the scale, a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.816 was obtained. Although item 2 shows the lowest correlation, the deletion of this item would not improve the overall reliability of the scale. Overall, the scale appears to be very reliable in this case. The following table shows the reliability test of the learning goal orientation scale.

Table 10: Results of Reliability Test for Learning Goal Orientation Scale

Reliability Statistics for Learning Goal Orientation

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	0.715	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(11) 22. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge	0.52	0.651
(12) 1. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills	0.437	0.685
(13) 3. For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks	0.331	0.737
(14) 14. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent	0.575	0.628
(15) 12. I am willing to take on a challenging work assignment that I can learn from	0.584	0.635

This test shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.715 which indicates reliability. In this case, item 13 shows a small correlation and if removed would provide a slightly improved alpha. This is not quite the same as the alpha of 0.88 achieved by Van de Walle, *et al.* (1997) but this difference could be attributed to a different type of respondent in this sample. Nevertheless the scale still tests as reliable and the results of the scale can be used as a measure of learning goal orientation in this case.

Table 11: Results of Reliability Test for Organisational Cynicism Scale

Reliability Statistics for Organisational Cynicism

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	0.837	10

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(16) 21. I believe that my organisation says one thing and does another.	0.742	0.8
(17) 20. My organisation's policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common.	0.609	0.814
(18) 2. When my organisation says its going to do something, I wonder if it will really happen.	0.454	0.83
(19) 9. My organisation expects one thing of its employees, but it rewards another.	0.619	0.813
(20) 4. I see little similarity between what my organisation says it will do and what it actually does.	0.561	0.819
(21)18. I complain about how things happen at my organisation to friends outside the organization.	0.566	0.818
(22) 16. I exchange 'knowing' glances with co-workers	0.291	0.843
(23) 6. I often talk to others about the ways things are run at my organisation.	0.217	0.849
(24) 24. I criticize my organisation's practices and policies with others.	0.643	0.811
(25) 11. I find myself mocking my organisation's slogans and initiatives.	0.597	0.815

The preceding table shows the results of reliability testing on the organisational cynicism scale. This ten item scale shows a high degree of reliability with an alpha of 0.837. Items 22 and 23 show a low correlation and if removed would improve the reliability to 0.843 and 0.849 respectively. Of most interest is the following table that shows the reliability of the item scale for self-perceived integrity of upward feedback.

Table 12: Results of Reliability Test for Upward Feedback Integrity Scale

Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	0.873	8

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(26) 26. I hesitate to give critical upward feedback to my supervisor	0.621	0.859

(27) 27. When I give critical upward feedback I try and make it sound like less of a problem than it is	0.654	0.855
(28) 28. When I give critical upward feedback I hold back on telling my supervisor everything that bothers me	0.774	0.841
(29) 29. I tend to agree with my supervisor's opinion and views even if I'm not completely convinced	0.487	0.871
(30) 30. When I give upward feedback , it is more about my supervisor's personality than behaviour or task related	0.49	0.871
(31) 31. I get the feeling that if I am very open in upward feedback it could be detrimental	0.7	0.85
(32) 32. If my upward feedback were completely anonymous, I would have more to say	0.643	0.857
(33) 33. I feel that my upward feedback is not really going to be used for anything	0.673	0.853

The results show a high level of reliability with an alpha of 0.873 overall for the eight item scale. Removal of the least correlated item (item 29) would not improve the reliability of the scale. The reliability test indicates that the responses to the scale can be reliably used to represent the construct.

5.3 Factor Analysis

The factor analysis carried out on each of the variables yielded the following results:

Table 13: Results of Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis

	KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's test of Sphericity	
		Approx Chi-square	Significance
Self-efficacy	0.86	764.281	0.000
Learning Goal Orientation	0.774	308.536	0.000
Organisational Cynicism	0.856	978.533	0.000
Self-perceived integrity of Upward Feedback	0.876	919.794	0.000

Analysis of the factor loadings of each item in each variable showed high factor loadings indicating that the variables have high internal validity. In the case of self-efficacy and organisational cynicism, it was found that

the variables could both be split into two factors. A look at each of the pattern matrices shows that each of the items loads heavily against one or the other factor. The variable, learning goal orientation showed only one factor that described 49.51% of variance with all items loading significantly against that factor except for item 13 (See Appendix E).

In the case of Integrity of upward Feedback, only one factor was identified which described 53.34% of the variance and each of the items loaded heavily against that factor. This means that this construct shows good internal validity and can be used with confidence for further testing.

5.4 Testing of Data

Once the scales had been verified as reliable and the constructs checked for validity, further analysis using the data was possible. A one-way Analysis Of Variance was performed between each variable combination to determine the relationships that exist between them (See Appendix F). The following table presents the results of the Pearson correlation.

Table 14: Results of Correlation Testing

Correlations

	Self-efficacy	Learning goal orientation	Organisational Cynicism	Integrity of UF
Self-efficacy	1	.646(**)	-.231(**)	.231(**)
		.000	.000	.000
	280	280	280	265
Learning goal orientation	.646(**)	1	-0.101	.241(**)
	.000		0.091	.000
	280	280	280	265
Organisational Cynicism	-.231(**)	-0.101	1	-.510(**)

	.000	0.091		.000
	280	280	280	265
Integrity of UF	.231(**)	.241(**)	-.510(**)	1
	.000	.000	.000	
	265	265	265	265
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

The relationships between the variables were defined based on the amount of correlation, as follows:

       0 – 0.1   → no correlation (two tailed)

       0.11 – 0.3   → low correlation

       0.31 – 0.5   → medium correlation

       > 0.5   → large correlation

Using this scale it was found that there was a large correlation between learning goal orientation and self efficacy. There is a low negative correlation between self-efficacy and organisational cynicism and there is a low positive correlation between self efficacy and feedback integrity. There is no correlation between learning goal orientation and organisational cynicism and there is a low positive correlation between learning goal orientation and feedback integrity. There is a large negative correlation between organisational cynicism and feedback integrity (See Appendix G for scatter plots).

The statistical significance of the correlations was tested using a t-test. The null hypothesis for this test is that the Pearson correlation is zero. Where the p-value is low (less than 0.01 – two tailed) this is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis or in other words to conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

This was the case in all the tests except between the variables learning

goal orientation and organisational cynicism.

6 DISCUSSION

For the purposes of this study, the research objectives have been met. A positive relationship between self-reported integrity of upward feedback and self-efficacy and learning goal orientation has been proven. In addition a negative relationship between self reported integrity of upward feedback and organisational cynicism has been proven. These support the hypotheses proposed by the researcher.

6.1 Upward Feedback Integrity and Self-efficacy

For the first hypothesis, $H1_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated positively with self-efficacy in the feedback giver, the analysis shows a low positive correlation between the variables of 0.231 which is significant at the 0.01 level. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected in this case and there is a positive relationship between self-reported integrity of upward feedback and self-efficacy.

In the context of this research this means that organisations can promote the quality of self-efficacy without detracting from the integrity of upward feedback. In this organisation, there exists a fairly high level of self-efficacy (mean of 3.8) indicating upward feedback given to managers tends to have integrity. It should be noted that the correlation was low, which would mean that integrity of feedback is not something that could be improved by improving self-efficacy but rather that integrity of feedback is something that exists in an environment of high self-efficacy.

This result is almost intuitive as a person who has high self-efficacy is able to take negative feedback and turn it into a positive change. Such a person would not find it difficult to give feedback with integrity. Rather, it is the person who avoids feedback out of fear (low self-efficacy) who would struggle to give honest feedback to another person. This sort of person doesn't really believe in change and as a result wouldn't see the benefit of supplying feedback to another person. These are similar to the findings of Heslin *et al.* (2004).

Interestingly, the organisation being measured scored highly on self-efficacy with an overall mean of 3.9 while the integrity of upward feedback scored 3.3. On the likert scale this sits somewhere between "sometimes" and "once or twice" for questions asking whether the respondent had ever not been fully honest. This means that there is a slight lack of integrity overall and that managers are taking in feedback and possibly acting on it, while it may not be in their best interests to do so.

This corroborates the work done by Facteau *et al.* (1998), where they showed that managers respond to feedback based on their evaluation of the feedback. Managers intuitively know that not all feedback is accurate and attempt to shield themselves by evaluating the source of the feedback prior to acting on it. This suggests that the blind implementation of an upward feedback system is perhaps not that effective. Organisations should encourage managers to solicit feedback

from multiple sources and when that feedback is corroborated by multiple sources, it is a good idea to act on it.

6.2 *Upward Feedback Integrity and Learning Goal Orientation*

The second hypothesis stated:

- $H2_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated positively with learning goal orientation in the feedback giver.

The results of the correlation test show a low positive correlation between these two variables of 0.241 which is significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be established that there is a relationship.

Again, the conclusion can be made that organisations can freely encourage or recruit people with learning goal orientation without negatively affecting the integrity of upward feedback. The objective of testing for this relationship was to determine if the correct conditions exist for the improvement of performance following upward feedback. It can then be concluded that in organisations where a high level of learning goal orientation exists, this doesn't detract from the integrity of the feedback that is being given and utilised.

Having established that this is the case, this puts the responsibility back with the organisations to ensure that they do whatever else they can to ensure that upward feedback is honest and constructive. With the certainty that this is the case, such a process can be used in

performance management systems without fear of negative consequences. Such negative consequences might be managers modifying their behaviour in the wrong way in order to gain a good score from a subordinate.

This relationship with integrity wouldn't hold for the other types of learning goal orientation, namely: proving and avoiding goal orientation. In the case of proving goal orientation, the individual attempts to prove competence and looking favourable to other people (Van de Walle *et al.* 2001). With this type of individual, although integrity of upward feedback would be useful, it probably wouldn't be well accepted and direct reports might avoid giving honest feedback.

In the case of an individual who has an avoiding goal orientation, the same research by Van de Walle *et al.* (2001) showed a negative relationship between avoiding goal orientation and self-efficacy, goal setting and performance. This individual avoids negative judgements from other people and would likely avoid getting feedback at all costs. Reports to this type of person would likely not give negative feedback at all for fear of causing offence.

6.3 Upward Feedback Integrity and Organisational Cynicism

The third hypothesis stated:

- $H3_0$: Self reported integrity in upward feedback is correlated negatively with organisational cynicism in the feedback giver.

The results of the correlation test showed a strong negative relationship in this case with a correlation of -0.51 which is significant at the 0.01 level. Again the null hypothesis is rejected and a relationship proven. This is a significant result in that it signifies the seriously detrimental effect that organisational cynicism has on integrity of upward feedback.

Besides all the other negative connotations of having high organisation cynicism in an organisation, the impact on communication and upward feedback is clearly a problem. This suggests the need for organisations using upward feedback to put in place mechanisms to measure the amount of organisational cynicism on a regular basis. Any signs of an increase in this variable should signal alarm bells and immediate action to prevent further negative consequences.

This conclusion establishes one critical condition necessary for integrity in upward feedback, namely: low organisational cynicism. If one had to establish an order of priority of the variables being measured in this study, organisational cynicism appears to be the most important with the other two being secondary. Not only would a high level of this variable hinder honest feedback it would also hinder the process of using the feedback constructively. This was established in the study by Atwater *et al.* (2000) where individuals who were most cynical showed the least amount of commitment to subordinates and consequently the least amount of improvement following upward feedback.

It should be noted that organisational cynicism can exist within an individual or within pockets in an organisation or it could be organisation wide. This re-enforces the need for organisations to have mechanisms in place to detect the onset of cynicism from an individual level. Having such a barometer in place would allow the organisation to target individuals who have growing cynicism and take steps to change this behaviour in the individual, thus allowing them to continue developing positively within the organisation.

In the organisation under study, the overall mean of organisational cynicism was 2.64 while the mean for integrity of upward feedback was 3.35. While not a cause for serious alarm bells in either case, as an organisation, it would be worth investigating further why the levels of cynicism are not lower and the level of integrity of feedback is not higher.

6.4 Self-efficacy and Learning Goal Orientation

Although not part of the hypotheses, the relationship between these variables was tested. The result corroborates the work done by Van de Walle *et al.* (2001). They found a positive relationship of 0.4 between the variables, while in this study a high positive correlation of 0.65 was found between these two variables.

This finding would suggest that a person with a high level of the one attribute already possesses a high level of the other. Indeed, intuitively, a person with high self-efficacy who believes that they can overcome

anything is more likely to set about a task in a constructive way that will allow them to overcome it. Such a way would be by setting goals with stretch that allow them to discover new things along the way.

This also talks to the type of people one would want in an organisation. A person with attributes that are low in either of these variables is undesirable as they are not going to be motivated to advance the performance of the organisation within their influence, or, even worse, will grow ever more perplexed by the changing environment around them and their inability to deal with it that the organisational performance declines.

6.5 *Self-efficacy and Organisational Cynicism*

The correlation testing between these two variables found a low negative correlation of -0.23. In line with the above findings, organisational cynicism appears to be counter-productive. The low correlation suggests that people with high self efficacy could still exist with high levels of organisational cynicism. The question might be: How long could such a person apply their self-efficacy in the interests of the organisation?

In general, an organisation with a high degree of cynicism is going to struggle to build sufficient levels of self-efficacy. This highlights a previous point that tackling cynicism in an organisation should be a priority task, whether dealing with the effectiveness of an upward feedback programme or not.

Returning to the theoretical model proposed by Smither *et al.* (2005), this research has created further clarity around the "Characteristics of the Feedback" box. While the relationships between the levels of self-efficacy, learning goal orientation, organisational cynicism and the integrity of the feedback are better understood, there still remain other factors that influence feedback integrity.
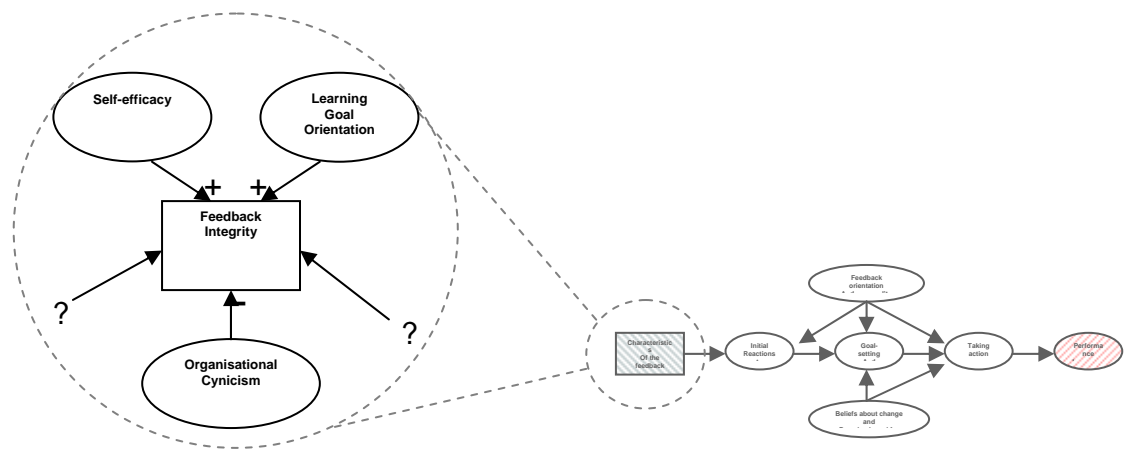

Figure 2: Characteristics of the Feedback

Although the levels of these variables were measured from an organisation wide perspective, when it comes to giving feedback, it is the feedback giver's levels of these variables that shape the feedback. In the theoretical model, it is the feedback recipient's levels of these variables that determine the reaction and ensuing actions.

7   CONCLUSION

A rigorous approach has been applied to the problem of upward feedback integrity. This particular issue has not been researched in any great detail until now.   The assumption on the subject of upward feedback has been that the feedback given to managers is on-the-level and constructive. The researcher was not satisfied with this assumption and set out to determine the relationship between integrity of upward feedback and the attributes of managers that other researchers have linked to performance improvement following upward feedback.

Data was gathered using a questionnaire in which every attempt was made to alleviate the effects of measurement reactivity.   The questionnaire itself was formulated by using item scales proven reliable and valid through previous research.   The only variable that wasn't tested as to it's validity prior to the collection of data was that of integrity of upward feedback.   Every attempt was made to ensure that this construct was valid including pre-testing the questionnaire on a sample of the population and utilising the experience of the supervisor of this research.

After the data was gathered, the testing that was carried out on the responses indicated that the item scales did indeed possess a high degree of reliability and the constructs had good internal validity.   This included the construct on integrity of upward feedback.   This allowed the researcher to continue testing the data to establish the relationships that existed between the variables.

A low positive relationship was found between integrity of upward feedback and self-efficacy. Based on this relationship, null hypothesis 1 was rejected; meaning that, by promoting the attribute of self-efficacy within an organisation, the integrity of upward feedback is not compromised. In fact due to the positive relationship, the promotion of this attribute in all employees will lead to better integrity of feedback.

In the case of the organisation under study, a high level of self-efficacy was found as well as a relatively high level of feedback integrity. The feedback integrity variable indicated some signs of problems in that responses to the items measuring this construct varied considerably with a large standard deviation. Although not indicative of a breakdown in feedback integrity, certainly between respondents there was a varied response. This could mean that in certain sections of the organisation integrity is a problem while in others it is really quite good.

This is further indicated by analysis not included in this report as it doesn't relate to the hypotheses but between the different regions in the organisation the means showed some differences. In the ANOVA test between groups on this variable, one region's mean (Central) showed a p-value of 0.059 which just misses the test for significance and when compared to the p-values of the other regions further analysis is recommended.

A low positive relationship was also found between the integrity of upward feedback and learning goal orientation. Based on this relationship, null hypothesis 2 was rejected; meaning that, by promoting the attribute of learning goal orientation within an organisation, the integrity of upward feedback is not compromised. Again, due to the low positive relationship found between the variables it can be concluded that the promotion of learning goal orientation will lead to better integrity of feedback.

In the organisation under study, a high level of learning goal orientation was found. This would bode well for the development of managers into leaders and for the upward feedback process as a whole. Further analysis between groups on this variable indicated no significant differences between means for regions or grades.

A high negative correlation was found between integrity of upward feedback and organisational cynicism. This relationship led to the rejection of null hypothesis 3, meaning that a high level of cynicism in an organisation is detrimental to the integrity of upward feedback. Based on this finding, any organisation wishing to implement or improve the effectiveness of their upward feedback process should firstly focus on decreasing the amount of organisational cynicism that exists.

This would apply equally to any new initiative that an organisation wishes to implement. A high level of cynicism is just going to stand in the way of

change and promote inertia leading an increased probability of failure. It is recommended that organisations put in place some way of measuring this variable as it is so counter-productive to any change initiative, never mind just upward feedback integrity.

In the organisation under study, the overall level of organisational cynicism was low although it was not far from the median level. Again, although not a cause for alarm, any organisation would actually want to score very low on this variable. A mean score much closer to two or less would be closer to ideal. Further testing between groups on this variable showed a surprising consistency across the organisation in terms of geographic areas and grades. This talks to an organisation that, although geographically spread, has good communication and interaction between different groups.

7.1 Recommendations

Although it has now been proven that these particular attributes in employees do not detract from integrity of upward feedback it would be useful to determine the exact conditions that do encourage integrity. A study involving the attitudes of feedback recipients and givers could possibly shed more light on this topic. A longitudinal study examining the effects of certain interventions on upward feedback integrity could highlight some best practices for organisations.

Also, in South Africa, a multitude of cultural and other differences can get in the way of honest communication. This is further complicated by a lack of trust between these groups. Further understanding of integrity of upward feedback between sexes, races and cultural groups would go a long way to helping organisations find ways to improve communication.

This study examined the relationship between learning goal orientation and upward feedback integrity while ignoring the other factors of goal orientation. It might be worthwhile investigating the relationships between proving and avoiding goal orientations and the integrity of upward feedback.

This research was limited in its scope by the choice of data and its measurement and hence tended to measure self-reported integrity of upward feedback rather than actual integrity of upward feedback. A qualitative approach looking at the actual feedback given to managers over a period of time and assessing the integrity of such feedback might give a more accurate representation of integrity. This would require access to the records of upward feedback comments given to managers which would involve confidentiality issues.

Lastly, this research focused on the upward feedback mechanism. While this is a valuable source of information for the manager, many other sources of feedback can be used like colleagues, self-ratings, managers and customers. Further analysis into the integrity of feedback from

multiple sources might highlight new issues and attributes to be encouraged in an employee.

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