

**A MANAGER'S SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK AS
A TOOL IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

by

SONIA DE CASTRO PINHO

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SUPERVISOR: DR S E VOSLOO

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation, “A manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development”, is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Sonia De Castro Pinho

20 November 2006

ABSTRACT

Leadership development has become a focal area for most organisations today in an attempt to ensure that leaders are able to take them into the future and achieve a competitive advantage. Literature reveals that, among others, one of the most popular initiatives in leadership development includes the use 360-degree feedback.

Due to the sensitivity and challenge of giving and receiving 360 degree feedback, it is essential to understand the subjective experience of manager's who have recently undergone the process as well as the factors which influence and are influenced by the process.

To achieve this, a grounded theory study was conducted in a large manufacturing organisation. The data was collected through focus group interviews with a voluntary sample of senior managers who had participated in a 360 degree feedback process.

The outcomes of the study include a definition of "subjective experience" as well as a substantive theory on the subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. Findings indicate that individual's reactions coupled with the perception of both the accuracy and utility of the process are key contributors which form the essence of "subjective experience".

Past experience, present information and context were further identified to be key intervening variables of a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development.

A number of limitations within this study are explained and recommendations for future research and organisations are provided.

KEY TERMS

Leadership, feedback, 360-degree feedback, leadership development, leadership competency, ratee, raters.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide a general background on the rationale for the study of the subjective experience of managers toward 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. A brief background and the rationalisation for the study, as well as an outline of the problem statement, research aims, research design and method, will be provided. The data analysis process as well as the reporting of findings and chapter division will be addressed.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Constantly changing markets, increased competition and fluctuating costs are some of the major factors responsible for propelling organisations towards globalisation (Suutari, 2002). As organisational structures become flatter with a growth in virtual work (Green, 2002), Becton and Schraeder (2004) highlight organisation's need to focus on improving both process and communication. This proactive climate thus requires a move from simply employing traditional managers to leaders with global competencies and perspectives (Armandi, Oppedisano & Sherman, 2003). Hence, the development needs of leaders have become vitally important, and according to Pernick (2001), most organisations need to adapt a vigorous and deliberate strategy, to improve the skills of managers and executives.

According to Goleman (2002) leaders wishing to strengthen their abilities need to start by examining other people's perspectives in order to gain an accurate picture of themselves. Hence, Ryan, Brutus, Gregarus and Hakel (2000) propose increased use of feedback and need for developmental feedback, which McCarthy and Garavan (2001) view as an essential component of an effective performance improvement strategy. This is supported by a study conducted by Brett and Atwater (2001) which identified the fact that 25 percent of organisations use some form of feedback system to improve performance.

360-degree feedback systems have been advocated as impacting positively on both individual and organisational performance (Valle & Bozeman, 2002), and Cacioppe and Albrecht (2000) therefore identify it as a powerful method to improve the quality of leadership and management.

1.1.1 Understanding the 360-degree feedback process

According to Maurer, Mitchell and Barbeite (2002), the main purpose of 360-degree feedback is to heighten managers' self-awareness. This is accomplished through a comparison of their own perceptions of their leadership skills and personal style with those of important observers in the work environment (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000). Owing to the fact that this feedback recognises the complexity of management (Garavan, Morley & Flynn, 1997), presentation of this feedback allows managers and developing leaders to identify the skills they need to improve (Rosti & Shipper, 1998), confirm their strengths, identify leadership blind spots and behaviours or habits they may have an adverse impact on others, and hence confirm their developmental priorities (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000).

The 360-degree feedback process is directly related to a set of competencies that the literature, research and organisation identify as critical to leadership and management effectiveness (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000). As Pernick (2001) proposes, the competencies defined should be correlated with organisational effectiveness. Furthermore Hayes, Rose-Quirie and Allinson (2000) explain that while the major aim of leadership development is to ensure that leaders will be able to perform effectively in the future, studies have shown that the leadership competency framework developed for use in 360-degree feedback generally focuses on what managers do in the present. A more promising approach is therefore to ensure that organisations focus 360-degree feedback on the competencies that are likely to make the most significant difference in the future (Kur & Bunning, 2002).

Standard 360-degree feedback instruments are often used when the focus is developmental as opposed to evaluative, and provide an increase in reliability, repeatability, comparison against norms and flexibility (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000).

Since the 360-degree feedback process is dependent on raters it is essential to understand that, according to McCarthy and Garavan (2001), the most common sources of raters include supervisors, peers, subordinates and the self. If managers lack faith in the feedback provider, the feedback may be discredited and ignored (Becton & Schraeder, 2004). Hence participants should be solely responsible for the selection of their raters. Customers and suppliers have

recently been recognised as an important source of data and competitive advantage (Garavan et al., 1997; Testa, 2002). According to McCarthy and Garavan (2001), this is because both customers and suppliers can provide feedback on various quality dimensions in the organisation.

Evidence shows that intercorrelations between different rating sources were found to be generally low, resulting in inconsistencies with the way managers are rated. This was influenced by a number of impacting factors and variables (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; McCauley & Moxley, 1996).

Thus, for 360-degree feedback to be successful, Jansen and Vloeberghs (1999) content that it needs to be related to the business and have the commitment and involvement of upper managers. It should further emphasise clear and frequent communication of the purpose of the initiatives and the implications for each member of the organisation (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000). Anonymity and confidentiality should be guaranteed and the focal person should be able to select his or her raters (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999) who must, in turn, be afforded the opportunity to observe the various behaviours being rated (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). At the heart of 360-degree feedback is individual development. Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) stress the importance of ensuring that people see the behaviours that will be measured as significant and relevant to their jobs and that they are provided with ongoing support and follow-up.

Developmental feedback is useful if feedback recipients not only react to the interventions with favourable attitudes but also respond to the feedback by pursuing constructive developmental activities designed to enhance their skills (Maurer et al., 2002). McCauley and Moxley (1996) thus define feedback as a vital unfreezing process that enhances self-awareness and is only the beginning of the development process.

In summary, Thach (2002) explains that organisations that implement the 360-degree feedback process effectively generally link it to a specific business need, obtain top management buy-in and provide ongoing support and follow-up.

1.1.2 Reactions of leaders to the 360-degree feedback process

According to Jones and Bearley (1996), the main reason why leaders seek feedback on their competencies includes the fact that it provides information on a leader's current behaviour and the perceptions of others; acts as a guidance mechanism for continuous improvement; helps leaders validate their self-perceptions; ensures that leaders view themselves realistically; and most importantly, encourages organisational stakeholders to invest in the effectiveness of their leaders.

360-degree feedback is based on the assumptions that comparing discrepancies between self-perceptions and perceptions of others results in enhanced self-awareness which, in turn, results in maximum performance of managers and leaders (Garavan et al., 1997). In order for feedback to be translated into practice, Becton and Schraeder (2004) emphasise that it must influence the perception of feedback, the acceptance of the feedback and the motivation and willingness to use the information in future tasks. It is the very attitude towards the appraisal system and its characteristics that have a substantial impact on the ultimate effectiveness of that system (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001).

Owing to the fact that 360-degree feedback received as part of a developmental programme is more focused on the self, managers are often more negative towards this type of feedback (Ryan et al., 2000). According to McCarthy and Garavan (2001), this is especially true in organisational cultures that have been characterised as traditionally bureaucratic and hierarchical. Cacioppe and Albrecht (2000) explain this as the evidence that feedback is able to change a person's self-evaluation in a number of ways, including their estimate of competency, the goals individuals set and the level of an individual's esteem. Hence, most individuals experience tension regarding feedback, because of a desire to gain valuable information that conflicts with the desire to avoid anything that might harm one's self-concept (Ryan et al., 2000).

Despite being a threatening experience, McCauley and Moxley (1996) propose that feedback grabs the attention of managers because their work is relationship oriented; they are not usually privy to this type of feedback in the workplace; consistency among raters proves that it is

difficult to deny reliability; and our dynamic environment makes it crucial for organisations to ensure that their leaders receive feedback on a constant basis.

The manner in which the self processes information can often blind people to their own shortcomings and consequently undermine their relationships with others. Hence, as Leary (2004) explains, 360-degree feedback will enable individuals to self-reflect and think consciously about themselves. It is important to bear in mind that self-awareness in developing leaders has many implications for the organisation and often impacts on decision making, goal setting, job-related attitudes and leadership effectiveness (Moshavi, Brown & Dodd, 2003). However, according to Fletcher and Bailey (2003), there is a general belief that increasing self-awareness will have a positive effect on performance.

Therefore, although McCarthy and Garavan (2001) caution that negative feedback ratings often result in defensiveness and demotivation, Goleman (2002) explains that to become more effective, leaders need to solicit negative feedback.

Consequently, a number of reactions are expected from managers as a defence mechanism in self-awareness. These reactions are identified by Jansen and Vloeberghs (1999) as follows: completely neglecting the feedback, taking only the positive into account or being motivated only by the negative feedback and that which is provided by people they deem to be extremely important.

According to Fletcher and Bailey (2003), individuals with a high level of self-awareness are better able to incorporate comparisons of behaviour into their self-perception and these comparisons are often more valid and reliable. Conversely, people with a low self-awareness are more likely to discount feedback about themselves. This explains why, as the use of 360-degree feedback continues, individuals gain greater self-awareness, and the comparison between self-other ratings therefore becomes more congruent (Garavan et al., 1997).

Self-perception is a key element in the self-regulation process (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999), and Hattingh (2000) explains that the awareness of one's internal state and values enables one to manage oneself and to be flexible in adapting to change.

In order to avoid negative reactions, employers should attempt to ensure that managers are provided with a more balanced set of feedback in the process (Garavan et al., 1997), and feedback should be provided at an appropriate time (Jones & Bearley, 1996).

1.1.3 The impact of 360-degree feedback on leadership development

It has been found that when managers are confident that they will be able to improve their skills and abilities, their attitude towards the feedback system is often more favourable (Maurer et al., 2002), hence the importance of a development plan. According to McCauley and Moxley (1996), this plan should encourage managers to identify improvement goals and outline multiple strategies to get there.

Managers will formulate effective development plans if they understand how others perceive them, know what is available for self-improvement and are willing to take responsibility for what they decide to do about their own development (Jones & Bearley, 1996).

As suggested by Garavan et al., (1997), to ensure the success of 360-degree feedback as a developmental tool, supervisors should provide coaching and the organisation should reward managers for their efforts. Positive results are also obtained when the feedback process is built into broader strategic human resources activities (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000; Lepsinger & Lucia, 1997).

1.1.4 Improving the effectiveness of the 360-degree feedback process by understanding a manager's subjective experience

A number of studies have focused on the way in which 360-degree feedback impacts on the self-concept, self-perception and self-image of leaders (Armandi et al., 2003; Sosik, Potosky & Jung, 2002; Wimer, 2002; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). However, there is limited research outlining the subjective experience of managers towards 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. As in any process, individuals' subjective experience will influence their perception of the process as well as their buy-in and follow-through. The value of better understanding the subjective experience by identifying the common elements of a manager's

subjective experience will assist organisations to prepare and implement an effective 360-degree feedback process. Understanding a manager's subjective experience will also help organisations to identify common pitfalls and successes in the 360-degree feedback system and highlight the resultant perceptions influencing the outcomes of this process.

Subjective experience is undoubtedly a critical factor in ensuring effective buy-in, implementation and the outcome of the 360-degree feedback process in developing leaders.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Owing to the fact that organisations are constantly changing and the necessity to ensure leaders who are able to take organisations to the forefront, it would be of interest to identify how managers in current organisations experience 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. Their subjective experience will highlight the elements that formulate their perception and attitude towards the 360-degree feedback process. According to Thorne, Kirkman and O'Flynn-Magee (2004), subjective experience is based on constructed realities that are both complex and contextual. Understanding an individual manager's subjective experience and the complex and contextual elements that constitute these subjective experiences will help researchers and organisations to prepare and implement a far more effective process. This is because the 360-degree feedback process can be evaluated on the basis of expectations and perceptions of individuals, and organisations can review the 360-degree feedback process for maximum buy-in and positive outcomes.

The study will thus focus on identifying the subjective experience of senior managers in a global pulp and paper company. These managers participated in a 360-degree feedback process in an effort to contribute to leadership development in the organisation. The study will further seek to highlight and describe the major factors contributing to their subjective experience, taking into account their complexity and contextual nature. Since the researcher was unable to find a formal definition of subjective experience of managers in the literature, this will be a main focus area of the research and will form the foundational framework for defining the elements that constitute a manager's subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development.

1.2.1 Research questions

The following research questions will guide the structure and aim of the study:

- How do managers define the term “subjective experience”?
- How can leadership and leadership development be conceptualised?
- How can 360-degree feedback be conceptualised as a process and a tool in leadership development?
- What are common themes in the managers’ subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool?
- What factors impact on the “subjective experience” of managers towards 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool?
- What recommendations can be made to the organisation in terms of improving the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development, taking subjective experience into consideration?

1.3 GENERAL AIMS

The general aim of this research is to develop a theory of managers’ subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development and the factors impacting on the subjective experience. The study is guided by a number of research aims which are divided into literature as well as empirical aims.

1.3.1 Literature aims

The specific literature aims of this research are as follows:

- To conceptualise leadership and leadership development
- To conceptualise the need for leadership development in the current organisational climate
- To conceptualise how 360-degree feedback as a tool is developed and its implementation and impact on organisations
- To conceptualise the purpose, benefits and challenges of using 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development

1.3.2 Operational aims

The specific operational aims of this research are as follows:

- To conceptualise the term “subjective experience” in the understanding of current organisation managers
- To identify and describe common themes in managers’ subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool
- To identify and describe the factors that influence the subjective experience of managers in the use of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool
- To make recommendations on how to align managers’ subjective experiences of the 360-degree feedback to achieving the initial objective of leadership development

1.4 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

Since this study focuses on understanding the subjective experiences, actions and processes of managers in context, it will be based on interpretative research and relate to the positivist paradigm in the modernist genre (Babbie & Mouton, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1993; Denzel & Lincoln, 2003).

The key characteristic of the positivist paradigm is that it is believed that there is a single, unitary real world, realism (Babbie, 1995). It further emphasises, as coined by Smith (2003) that the individual is part of the real world and hence, processes of thought and emotions within the real world will have enduring characteristics. Operating within the modernist phase it can then be assumed that an individual’s construction of reality relates to the real world (Smith, 2003). Another theoretical underpinning of the modernist phase is symbolic interactionism which as Bogdan and Biklen (1993) explain is how individual’s attribute meaning to their experiences and processes of interpretation, this constituting their actual experience. In this study the researcher will encourage interaction among the managers as this will enable them to construct meaning and develop a common definition of their subjective experience, their reality (Bogdan & Biklen, 1993). Working within the positivist paradigm, the researcher will attempt to determine the reality in terms of the manager’s subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. To achieve this, the researcher will responsibly share language and

meanings with the managers providing an opportunity to bring different perspectives and concerns in comparison to the managers. The researcher will therefore, according to the modernist phase, be better able to rationalise the structure of scientific constructs in a direction which will approximate truth of the actual reality (Smith, 1993), in this instance the subjective experience of the managers.

This will allow the researcher to gain an understanding of the world of “lived experience” by the manager’s subjective reality (Locke, 2001). It will further ensure that managers are not considered to be passive vehicles in the use of 360-degree feedback in their development as leaders, but as Henning (2004) explains, recognise their inner capabilities for individual judgement, perceptions and decision making.

For researchers operating within this paradigm, Locke (2001) emphasises the importance of not only making responsible interpretations but also providing solid bases for them.

It would seem then that interpretative research is not simply aimed at gathering data but ensuring that reality is assessed, systemised, organised and rationalised (Henning, 2004). The study will be conducted within the qualitative paradigm because it’s primary goal is to describe and understand rather than explain the behaviour and experience of managers participating in 360-degree feedback as part of their development as leaders. It is therefore considered to be an exploratory study of a manager’s subjective experience.

1.4.1 Metatheoretical concepts

For the purpose of this research study, the following metatheoretical concepts will be referred to and are defined accordingly:

- *Leadership*. This involves the task of setting direction, creating alignment and gaining the commitment of organisational members in an effort to achieve goals and objectives that impact on change, through complex interaction with social and organisational environments that reflects mutual purpose (Day, 2000; Cardona, 2000; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004).

- *Feedback*. This is a source of information in the form of an assessment that helps individuals to gain valuable self-awareness (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000; Ryan et al. 2000).
- *360-Degree feedback*. This is a summary of feedback collected from peers, subordinates, supervisors, customers, suppliers and family members relating to a person's behaviour at work. It is typically focused on increasing self-awareness and enables individuals to compare their own perceptions and personal style with relevant others in the workplace in order to encourage required change to certain behaviours (Becton & Schraeder, 2004; Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000; McCarthy & Garavan, 2001).
- *Leadership development*. This includes interventions, programmes and processes in organisations aimed at building leadership potential in an organisation (Day, 2000). This includes the development of identified leadership competencies that correlate with organisational effectiveness (Pernick, 2001).
- *Leadership competency*. Competence is defined as a skill and standard of performance reached, whereas competency is the behaviour by which this is achieved (Woodruff in Moore, Cheng & Dainty, 2002; Rowe, 1995).
- *Ratee*. For the purpose of this study the term "ratee" is defined as the individual or employee who undergoes a 360-degree feedback assessment process. In this instance, it most often includes managers, and for the purpose of the focus groups and data analysis, reference made to managers, participants and individuals, refers to the ratee.
- *Raters*. For the purpose of this study, a "rater" is defined as the sources of feedback the ratee selects, and includes individuals who respond to the 360-degree feedback and rate or rank the ratee on certain competencies. Typical raters include supervisors, subordinates, colleagues and customers.

1.4.2 Scientific beliefs

In support of the discussion above, there are two scientific beliefs which are valued by the researcher in conducting this research study, namely ontology and epistemology.

Ontology refers to the study of being or reality (Mouton & Marais, 1990). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) this raises questions around the nature of an individual in the world and how an individual's social reality is constructed. From a social research perspective this refers to whether social reality exists independently from human conception and interpretation, whether there is common, shared, social reality or just multiple context-specific realities. The reality in this research study is therefore the subjective experience of managers as the researcher is of the view that only through discussion and understanding the purpose, process and context of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development, will the manager's be able to construct meaning in terms of their subjective experience.

The second scientific belief, epistemology, is what an individual regards as knowledge or evidence of things in the social world. In this instance Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain the need to identify the relationship between the inquirer and the known. Operating from this perspective the researcher accepts the assumption that subjective meanings of the manager's social behaviour (subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development) will qualify as scientific knowledge (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

With the above scientific beliefs supporting the positivist paradigm and modernist phase, the interpretation of the manager's reality (their subjective experience) will include formalised qualitative research design and rigorous data analysis methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Babbie and Mouton (2004) a research design is a strategy for conducting research and is defined as an extensive investigation of a single unit. A unit could include an individual, a group of individuals, a community, organisations and event and countries. The key criterion for selecting a case study as a research design is as stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1993) to learn more about a little or poorly understood situation, with the product of the research being an in depth description of a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). Therefore, as this research study is exploratory-descriptive in nature, following the recommendation of Denzin and Lincoln (2003), 'casing' has been selected as the appropriate research design. The researcher will,

following the principles of 'casing' as suggested by De Vos et al. (2005), situate the system within the broader context (interaction with other manager's in the organisation) but with the focus remaining on the case or issue, this being, each individual manager's subjective experience. Hence, this is termed an intrinsic case study (De Vos et al., 2005). Evidently the research study will then move from broad exploratory beginnings to more directed data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1993) in an attempt to learn about a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development.

Construct validity and in-depth insight into the manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as well as the ability for the researcher to build rapport with the research participants are clear advantages of using casing as a research design during this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). However, De Vos et al. (2005) highlight the challenge of the lack of generalisability of the research results due to focus on an intrinsic case study within a specific organisation as a potential limitation to the study. This is supported once again by Leedy and Ormrod (2001) who identify the fact that data collection and analysis within casing proves to be time consuming.

Using casing as a research design, the method of analysis will as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2001), be based on grounded theory. This will assist in meeting the key aim of the case study and thus be based on analytic abstraction and construction for the purpose of description and generation of a theory on the subjective experience of manager's (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Because grounded theory is a form of qualitative research, the general research problem has been formulated and general questions relating to the phenomenon have been identified (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Since this study is a qualitative research design, the research and data collection will take place in a natural setting, in this instance, the organisation at which the managers underwent the 360-degree feedback process (Silverman, 2000). Owing to the fact that qualitative studies evolve over the course of investigation, a considerable amount of preparation and planning, will, as advised by Leedy and Ormrod (2001), be required.

According to Locke (2001), the main aim of the grounded theory approach is to formulate a theory, developed from substantive grounding in a concrete social situation. Glaser (1992) emphasises that grounded theory is a general methodology of analysis which is linked to data

collection through the use of a systematic set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area. Essentially, as Henning (2004) explains, grounded theory follows a set of inductive steps that lead the researcher from studying the concrete realities of a situation and rendering a conceptual understanding of them. The substantive area in this instance will be the definition and explanation of the subjective experience of managers towards 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development (Silverman, 2000).

The grounded theory study will begin with data that will be systematically gathered and analysed through the research process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). As stated by Henning (2004), this analysis will be extended to more sophisticated levels of abstraction ensuring a conceptualised understanding of the data and leading to an ultimate substantive theory. In essence, this results in a move from empirical observation to the definition of concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the process, Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that analysis should be viewed as the interplay between the researcher and the data. This is because grounded theory analysis encourages researchers to use their intellectual imagination and creativity to develop theories relating to their areas of inquiry (Locke, 2001). Glaser (1992) highlights the fact that grounded theory is emergent and the final product is to render only emergent conceptual linkages from which a theory can be developed.

1.5.1 Strategies to enhance the quality of this study

To ensure that the substantive theory developed in this study is valid and reliable, a number of measures and factors will be considered.

Silverman (2000) defines validity as that which constitutes a credible claim of truth. Since the researcher is responsible for guiding the focus group interview processes, it is common for the focus to be selectively on the responses required for the topic being researched. This often impacts on the context of the research being reduced to only a particular time in the participant's experience. This has a negative impact on the "truth value" and realness of the data (Henning, 2004). In order to establish the truth value, the researcher will ensure that data are treated with precision, care and accountability; there will be open communication with participants throughout the data collection and analysis process resulting in the data having both ethical and

practical use (Henning, 2004). The researcher will also take cognisance of the likelihood of the Hawthorne effect, as proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2001).

To obtain external validity, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) suggest that the researcher should aim for credibility, confirmability and transferability.

To ensure a more credible theoretical framework, Locke (2001) has suggested that the study should have a greater range of generalisability and that the researcher's own subjective experience should be a dimension of credibility. To ensure that the findings are free of bias, in line with Silverman (2000), the researcher will seek objectivity. Guidelines the researcher will follow in attempting to achieve objectivity as provided by Strauss and Corbin (1998) include the following: thinking comparatively; obtaining multiple viewpoints of an event; gathering data on the same event or phenomenon in different ways; maintaining a sceptical viewpoint; and following research procedures as outlined, prior to the commencement of data collection and analysis.

A method to achieve confirmability, as suggested by Silverman (2000), will be applied. This method involves the constant comparative method in which the researcher will inspect and compare different cases across focus groups in order to elicit the emergence of conceptual linkages.

In an attempt to achieve transferential validity, as suggested by Smaling (1992), the researcher will use a thick description around the research situation, context and research process as well as an explication of the arguments for the different choices of methods used. This will include the focus group interviews, the organisation in which the research is conducted as well as the focus group interview process and moderator guide applied. The researcher will further aim to ensure a logical framework contributing to logical validity (Bruinsma & Zwanenburg, 1992).

The researcher's endeavour to provide thick statements and ensure credibility will influence the reliability of the research. Silverman (2000) defines reliability as the extent to which findings can be replicated or reproduced.

According to Silverman (2000), the problem of credibility that arises here has to do with the way the researcher goes about categorising the events or activities described. In this study, reliability will be achieved by ensuring that all the procedures are documented and that categories are consistently used (Silverman, 2000). The researcher will then aim to identify conceptual categories which, according to Locke (2001), have analytic generalisability when they can account for a large number and range of empirical observations.

One of the most common methods to obtain reliability is through intercoder agreement. However, because only one researcher will be coding the data, this is not possible in this study. Hence the researcher will exercise caution in transcribing even the seemingly trivial but crucial pauses and overlaps (Silverman, 2000). Once attention has been drawn to these overlaps it will become evident that judgements can be made that are more convincingly valid. Description and explication by the researcher will be ensured in order to achieve external reliability and transferential validity (Bruinsma & Zwanenburg, 1992).

According to Locke (2001), theoretical saturation is also necessary and contributes to achieving reliability and validity. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that theoretical saturation is achieved when no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category; the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions, thus demonstrating variation; and the relationships between categories are well established and validated. Hence the researcher will attempt to reach a stage in which subsequent data incidents that are examined provide no new information either in terms of refining the category or its properties, or relationships with other categories.

Triangulation will also be used as a method to ensure validity and reliability (Babbie & Mouton, 1998). However, the researcher will adhere to an essential ground rule as suggested by Silverman (2000) in carrying out this process: the first is that the researcher will begin from a theoretical perspective and choose methods and data that will account for the structure and meaning from within that particular perspective, hence the fact that focus group interviews were the selected methods of data collection.

1.5.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis will include the three focus groups composed of individual senior managers currently employed in a South African global pulp and paper manufacturing organisation. These senior managers will be expected to undergo a 360-degree feedback process as part of an organisational programme focused on developing leadership skills in the organisation.

1.6 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method consisted of two phases involving a literature review and operational research. These phases are described below in further detail.

1.6.1 Phase 1: literature review

A literature review of current studies and research will be conducted to meet the literature aims outlined and to provide the researcher with an efficient knowledge base of the topic, prior to commencing and completing the empirical study. This will include conceptualising leadership and leadership development as well as 360-degree feedback as a process and a tool in leadership development. The researcher will further review the literature on the purpose, benefits and challenges of the 360-degree feedback process.

1.6.2 Phase 2: operational research

The operational research phase will focus on achieving the empirical aims already outlined and will include the following steps:

1.6.2.1 Step 1: sampling

Data will be collected from a purposive sample of senior managers participating in the 360-degree feedback exercise and who offered to voluntarily participate in focus group interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). As suggested by Greenbaum (1998), the researcher will attempt to ensure group homogeneity and carefully match the chosen categories of participants from the

group of managers volunteering to participate. According to Morgan (1997), these smaller, homogenous groups will allow the researcher to obtain a clear sense of each participant's reaction to the topic under study because this will afford the participants the opportunity to not only have more time to talk, but also ensure free flowing conversations.

1.6.2.2 Step 2: data collection

Focus group interviews will be used as the main source of data collection. This has been identified, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) as an appropriate source of data collection in 'casing' and De Vos et al. (2005) highlight that it draws on three fundamental strengths of qualitative research, namely: exploration and discovery, context and depth and finally interpretation. Participants will thus be provided with the opportunity to respond in their own words, providing the researcher with information on their perceptions about associations and categorisations regarding both their definition of "subjective experience" and their understanding of their own experience of the 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Three, one-and-a-half-hour focus group interviews with a maximum of six senior managers per group will be conducted.

Focus group interviews will further allow data collection through group interaction on the topic of the managers' definition of "subjective experience", at the same time providing direct evidence of similarities and differences in participants' opinions and experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development (Morgan, 1997). More importantly, Berg (2001) highlights that the interactions between group members often stimulate discussion in which one group member reacts to comments made by another, leading to the "synergistic group effect".

Since this study involves exploratory research, with the focus on attempting to describe subjective views and perceptions, a semi structured approach will be followed in conducting the focus group interviews. Morgan (1997) terms this the "funnel" compromise approach and follows the principle of initially allowing free discussion in the focus group interviews in order to understand individual perspectives and then narrowing this down to more specific themes or categories of particular interest to the researcher.

In line with Greenbaum (1998) suggestion, in order to manage the focus group interview, the researcher will develop a moderator guide during the preparation phase to meet the following objectives: role clarification of the moderator; scheduling the focus group interview at a time and place suitable for all the participants involved; ensuring that the appropriate equipment is in working order; and preparing an interview guideline agenda to ensure that the focus group interview meets the necessary aims of the study. To aid this process in focus groups, the researcher will have to distinguish between what participants find interesting and what they find important. The most basic way in which to determine this is to ask the participants (Morgan, 1997).

Some guiding questions the researcher will ask at the stage when she is tasked with seeing the whole have been suggested by Henning (2004) and include the following: what are the relationships in meanings between these categories? What do they say together and what do they say about each other? What is missing? How do they address the research question? How do these categories link up with what I already know about the topic?

These focus groups will be recorded on audiotape which the researcher will transcribe at the end of each focus group. She will also take interviewer notes during the focus groups in order to ensure that the context is considered during the analysis process.

Initially, the focus group interviews will be used as self-contained methods in the research process, serving as the principal source of data and a basis to complete the study (Morgan, 1997).

A number of ethical issues will be appropriately handled prior to commencing the data collection process. The first includes addressing participants' concerns about the invasion of privacy since, taping will be the primary source of data collection (Berg, 2001). The researcher will prepare a document for participants' to sign detailing the purpose and outcomes of the research study in order to obtain voluntary and informed consent (Henning, 2004). Further, the researcher will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all data collected through the focus group interviews.

1.6.2.3 *Step 3: data analysis*

Once the data have been collected, the audiotapes transcribed and the interview notes edited the data analysis process will continue. In line with Henning (2004), the researcher will begin to familiarise herself with all the data collected in order to obtain a global impression of the data. To facilitate this process, Locke (2001) suggests that the researcher should be responsible for transcribing the tapes as this will afford her the opportunity to gain a real understanding of the data.

Since the ultimate aim of this grounded theory study is the development of a theory relating to the managers' subjective experience of 360-degree feedback, the researcher will attempt to arrange sets of concepts to define and explain this phenomenon (Silverman, 2000).

Owing to the nature of the data collection, both the actual words used by the participants as well as the researcher's own conceptualisation of these will form part of the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence, the researcher will analyse the data taking into consideration the shared experience of both the researcher and the participants as well as the relationship between the researcher and participants (Henning, 2004).

The researcher initiates data analysis, by labelling units of meaning in the data, which Henning (2004) refers to as **open coding**. In analysing the data, Silverman (2000) suggests that the researcher should focus on data that are of a high quality and the easiest to collect (Silverman, 2000). Data fragments will be analysed line by line, but as Locke (2001) explains, the researcher will have to use her own judgement about what constitutes a relevant and coherent data fragment. Because the data analysis involves transcriptions from audiotapes, according Silverman (2000), the researcher should always attempt to identify sequences of related talk and try to examine how speakers take on certain roles or identities through their talk.

The researcher will attempt to conceptualise and develop abstract meaning for the observations or incidents in the data documents by articulating what she perceives is happening or is being expressed in those incidents. Thus, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher must ensure an open mind in identifying the thoughts, ideas and meanings contained in the data. Each

incident will be named or labelled, representing the researcher's interpretation of what is happening (Locke, 2001). This coding will be done in the margins of the transcribed documents and interview notes.

At this stage of analysis, the researcher will also begin the process of writing memos. This is the researcher's record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions and directions for future data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This will initially be done in the margins of the transcribed data and interview notes and, according to Locke (2001), involves writing a note on an idea that has arisen as a result of a particular incident in the research.

Although this form of open coding is time-consuming, it will be especially important at the beginning of the study because it will enable the researcher to generate categories quickly (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Once codes have been developed, the researcher will begin comparing data fragments for similarities and differences, assisting in the development of concepts which, according to Locke (2001), may be both relational and descriptive. The researcher will identify descriptive concepts in the transcribed data in order to understand what the subjective experience of the managers and relational concepts to specify observable relationships in the data (Locke, 2001). Since the researcher is analysing focus group interviews, Morgan (1997) suggests that to facilitate the process, mention of all codes and concepts should be made and this should then be linked to identifying whether each individual participant and each group discussion contained a given code or concept.

In comparing codes, conceptual categories will be created and these will enable the researcher to develop a common name or category for multiple observations as well as help her to clarify the managers' perception of the data (Locke, 2001). Locke (2001) recommends that the researcher should write a clear formal theoretical definition for each category identified. This grouping of concepts into categories will enable the researcher to reduce the number of units she is working with and provide the potential to explain and predict the subjective experience of the managers in the specified research context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is also during this time that the researcher will, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), begin identifying the range of potential

meanings contained in the words used by the respondents and develop them more fully in terms of their properties and dimensions.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) define properties as the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category, while dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum. In order to address the question of reliability and validity, Locke (2001) states that the more properties a conceptual category possesses, the more fully described or theoretically dense it is. However, it is recommended that the number of categories generated be limited because it obviously requires much in the way of both personal analytic and evidentiary data resources (Locke, 2001).

If required at this stage, the researcher will identify and develop subcategories necessary to describe the concepts themselves and answer any questions about the phenomenon under study. It is also during this stage in the data analysis process that the researcher will begin identifying and describing emerging conceptual linkages.

In the second form of analytic activity, the researcher will aim to fully develop and organise the conceptual categories drafted (Locke, 2001). According to Henning (2004), the researcher will notice how categories begin to show themes and patterns that can be constructed from the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), these patterns are formed when groups of properties, of both categories and subcategories align themselves along various dimensions. This signals the initial stage of axial coding.

As the researcher begins identifying the properties of a particular category and becomes involved in the comparative process, recording a memo on the comparison of ideas captures the theoretical meanings and will provide the researcher with the analytic space to reflect and work out those ideas (Locke, 2001).

In order to analyse the categories, the researcher will work from the paradigm of the 6 C's introduced by Glaser (1978). This paradigm requires integrating the substantive category in a causal-consequence theoretical framework that describes the context and conditions under which it occurs, those factors upon which it is contingent and identifies any categories with which it may covary (Locke, 2001). Importantly, the researcher should examine comparative situations

in order to determine how a conceptual category or property may be affected by different conditions, allowing the researcher to collect enough information to stabilise and saturate each of the conceptual elements in the working theory (Locke, 2001).

The researcher will then be able to initiate the integration of properties and dimensions of conceptual categories, write memos that will serve the purpose of supporting the researcher's efforts to articulate the significance of the categories developed and begin working out on paper the relationships between the analytic elements (Locke, 2001).

As categories are developed and theoretical formulations composed, the researcher will be responsible to integrate and bring the analysis to a close. The aim here will be for the researcher to settle on the framework's theoretical components and clarify the story relating to the manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as part of leadership development (Locke, 2001). At this stage the researcher will realise that as the theory solidifies, major modifications become fewer. The aim for the researcher is that the categories will have developed to a point where their properties and dimensions reasonably account for the data incidents indicating particular concepts (Locke, 2001).

According to Morgan (1997), three factors influence how much emphasis a given topic should receive when working with focus group interview data. These include the number of groups which mentioned the topic; the number of people in each group who mentioned the topic; and how much energy and enthusiasm the topic generated among participants (Morgan, 1997).

The researcher will also have to make a commitment to telling a particular story and reduce some of the conceptual categories identified through the data analysis (Locke, 2001), which, in turn, will help the researcher to focus on more robust categories.

Most management and organisation researchers have recently been reported as expressing interest in **process-oriented theories** (Locke, 2001). This is appropriate for the particular study at hand, because the researcher is concerned with stories as abstract conceptual models that explain a sequence of events in a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback.

Coding for process is also part of axial coding and Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that instead of looking for properties the researcher will purposefully look for an action/ interaction and note the movement, sequence and change and how it evolves in response to changes and conditions. However, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, process and structure are inextricably linked and the researcher will therefore search for structure in understanding why certain events happen in their context as well as process in understanding the interaction of the managers in the study. At this stage, the memos produced at earlier stages will provide the theoretical substance for writing the theory in terms of this study (Locke, 2001).

The researcher will find it difficult to begin the theory building process because according to Locke (2001), it challenges the researcher's attempt to generalise beyond the empirical data.

Once the researcher has outlined the overarching theoretical scheme, she will start to review the scheme for internal consistency and gaps in logic. The researcher will be responsible for filling in poorly developed categories and trimming excess ones and validating scheme. As stated by Locke (2001), although theory is emergent and processual, a point will be reached where the theoretical framework will suffice for the researcher to have something substantive to say about the subjective experience of managers toward 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool.

1.6.2.4 Step 4: reporting the findings

Interpretation of the data will occur with the assistance of memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) where the researcher will conceptualise the categories, properties and patterns identified. This interpretation will result in the emergence of conceptual linkages and through the conceptualisation and interpretation thereof, a substantive theory will be derived.

The theory will be written with a view to not only be pragmatic, useful and understandable, but also to provide a degree of control to the individual using the theory by ensuring that the data and theory are congruently and consistently integrated (Locke, 2001). To this end, Morgan (1997) has suggested that when reporting on findings, a balance between direct quotations from the participants and a conceptualisation of their discussion and the developing theory should be

presented. The reasoning behind this is that a focus on only theoretical elements does not capture the reality of the study (Locke, 2001) and may therefore deprive the reader of the indirect contact with participants (Morgan, 1997). Hence, examples of data incidents and theoretical elements will be presented in the form of tables and figures ensuring a link between theory and empirical elements (Locke, 2001).

The researcher will consider chronology, context, comparison, implications and lateral thinking as outlined by Silverman (2000) when analysing and reporting the substantive theory.

According to Locke (2001), literature that is relevant to the conceptual elements presented, will be integrated into the theory as appropriate, but this may either be integrated into the results chapter or discussed as a separate chapter, depending on the theory development.

The researcher will focus her efforts on ensuring that the results of the operational research are presented and reported accordingly in theory development. To ensure that sufficient effort is allocated to demonstrating that good scientific practice is followed but also ensure adequate focus on presenting the results, the chapters will be subdivided accordingly.

1.7 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The dissertation will consist of five chapters in total. The first chapter will meet the literature aims already identified.

Chapter 2 will comment on the move organisations are making from a management to a leadership focus and the factors impacting on this. Both management and leadership will be conceptualised, in line with the proposed study, with the emphasis on the characteristics organisations are searching for in future leaders. Leadership development and its objective will be highlighted to explain a number of different initiatives organisations are developing and implementing in an effort to develop leaders. The popular use of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development will be highlighted and briefly explained.

This chapter will further seek to provide an accurate description of what 360-degree feedback is. The 360-degree feedback process will be conceptualised and formally defined and its potential use explained. The purpose, advantages and disadvantages of using this tool will also be highlighted.

To ensure an understanding of the complex process organisations should follow in the implementation of 360-degree feedback, the process used in developing, preparing and implementing this exercise in an organisation will be outlined.

Key factors to ensure the successful implementation of 360-degree feedback as well as the current challenges organisations are facing in implementing this tool, will be highlighted.

Finally, the use of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development will be discussed with the focus on the advantages of using such a tool, the current challenges as well as appropriate guidelines to improve its use as a leadership development tool.

Chapter 3 will discuss the operational study which will include a description of the process followed in preparing for the research and focus groups, conducting and analysing the focus group information and any further research information collected, as well as the data analysis and reporting process.

Chapter 4 will report on the results of the research study and data analysis and describe and conceptualise these results in relation to current literature and research. The results will be interpreted and the grounded theory relating to managers' subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development will be provided.

The final chapter, chapter 5, will include the substantive theory developed based on the data analysis and summarise the research study conducted. Recommendations and limitations to the study will be highlighted.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explains the background to and rationale for the proposed study of understanding the subjective experience of managers towards the use of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool. It also identified the necessary empirical and literature aims as well as the research design and methodology to be followed in conducting the study. The layout and the contents of the relevant chapters included in this research study were also explained.

The following chapter will provide additional information in an attempt to meet the literature aims highlighted in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

360-DEGREE FEEDBACK AS A TOOL IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The volatile and ambiguous environment in which organisations operate require leaders who are able to adapt, change and challenge the status quo (Feinberg, Ostroff & Burke, 2005). It has been stated by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) that leadership is the key to success in any organisation change effort. Day (2000) who views leadership as a source of competitive advantage supports this statement.

In order to be successful, leadership needs to be aligned with organisational strategy (Storey, 2004) because as Pernick (2001) explains, it influences an organisation's performance. Hence building leadership capacity in an organisation seems to ensure that it is in line with the organisational culture and strategic agenda (Pernick, 2001) which are important elements in a proactive environment. According to Maurer et al. (2002), a leader's real ability rests in his or her ability to work with other people. Leaders need input from different sources to understand the effect of their behaviour, guide their development and improve their performance (Brutus, Fleenor & London, 1998). A number of assessment tools have been developed to assist leaders in obtaining the feedback they require with the 360-degree feedback process being one of the most popular. This process allows leaders to obtain feedback from a range of sources, reducing bias and subjectivity and supporting developmental activities.

This chapter will define leadership and leadership development and elaborate on the use of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development.

2.1 DEFINING LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In an organisation's attempt to remain competitive, more than just traditional managers are required. According to Armandi et al. (2003) managers who are leaders are required. Hence organisations are attempting to formally develop leaders to take them forward. At this juncture it is necessary to define the concepts of leadership and leadership development. These definitions will be used and accepted for the purpose of this study.

2.1.1 Leadership

Leadership can be defined as the interrelationship of influence between leaders and followers with the intention of initiating real change, reflecting mutual purposes and achieving a common goal (Armandi et al., 2003; Cardona, 2000). Five common factors in the definition of leadership are highlighted by Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg and Williamson (1997). These include interpersonal influence; influential increment; encouraging others to act and respond to a shared direction; influencing by persuasion; and being the principal force motivating and coordinating the accomplishment of organisational objectives. However, Storey (2004) emphasised the importance of understanding that leadership is also about an individual, the leader as a person and his or her ability to demonstrate insight, not only into the organisational issues at hand, but also into himself or herself.

According to research by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) leadership can be enhanced by intervening in the learning, growth and change processes of individuals, explaining the prominent organisational focus on leadership development in successful organisations today. These organisations do not wait for leaders to come along; instead, they actively seek out people with leadership potential and expose them to career experiences designed to develop that potential.

2.1.2 Leadership development

The primary advantage of building leadership capacity among internal staff members is that the organisation is able to groom the next generation in line with its culture and strategic agenda (Pernick, 2001). According to Day (2000) and McCauley and Van Velsor (2004), a leadership development approach is oriented toward building organisational capacity, in our ambiguous environment, to proactively perform the basic leadership tasks to collectively set direction, create alignment and maintain commitment and motivation.

The most essential step in the process is to ensure leadership development which McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) define as the expansion of an individual's capacity to be effective in enacting leadership roles and processes. The primary emphasis of the overarching development strategy in

developing leaders is to build the intrapersonal competence needed to form an accurate model of oneself and to use that self-model to perform effectively in any number of organisational roles (Day, 2000; Storey, 2004).

In a nutshell, leadership development can be regarded as an integration strategy helping individuals self-reflect, obtain an understanding of how they relate to others and assist in coordinating individual efforts as well as developing extended social networks.

As mentioned earlier, the organisational focus on different tools and assessments to promote and implement leadership development has increased hence the need to understand the types of tools currently available.

2.2. THE TOOLS USED IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Although a number of leadership development programmes have been implemented in organisations, the most popular approach to leadership development in organisations is the use of formal assessments (Atkins & Wood, 2002).

According to McCauley and Van Velsor (2004), assessment has gained credibility through its ability to provide individuals with a clear understanding of their current state, highlighting their strengths and providing an indication of the expected level of effective leader performance. This in turn helps individuals to identify development gaps, resulting in an increase of their level of self-awareness (Mumford & Gold, 2004). Increased self-awareness has according to Fletcher and Baldry (2000), been shown to correlate positively with leadership effectiveness.

In response to the major trends in leadership development, organisations are required to provide resources that not only make development possible but also create a culture that supports continuous learning. A number of initiatives have been introduced and continue to grow in popularity. The main ones are highlighted in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Leadership development initiatives (Day, 2000; Suutari, 2002; Thach, 2002)

Leadership development initiatives	Key elements
Executive Coaching	One-on-one learning; goal focused; outcome is behavioural change; ongoing process
Mentoring	Provides psychosocial and career support; both informal and formal mentoring is popular; challenge is how to find most appropriate combination
Networking	Goal is to develop leaders with “know who” capacity to solve problems; builds peer relationships and creates additional social capital; breaks down barriers across functional areas
Job assignments	Development through job experience; assignments should be matched with individual development needs; assists in learning to build teams; develops strategic thinking, persuasion and influence skills
Action learning	Assumption that people learn most effectively when working on real-time organisational problems; structured opportunities for individual and group reflection are included
360-degree feedback	Provides information from multiple sources; allows for self-assessment; identifies gaps between self-perception and others’ view; results in incentive to reduce gaps

However, a number of factors should be highlighted to ensure that suitable initiatives are selected and result in an organisation’s increased leadership capacity.

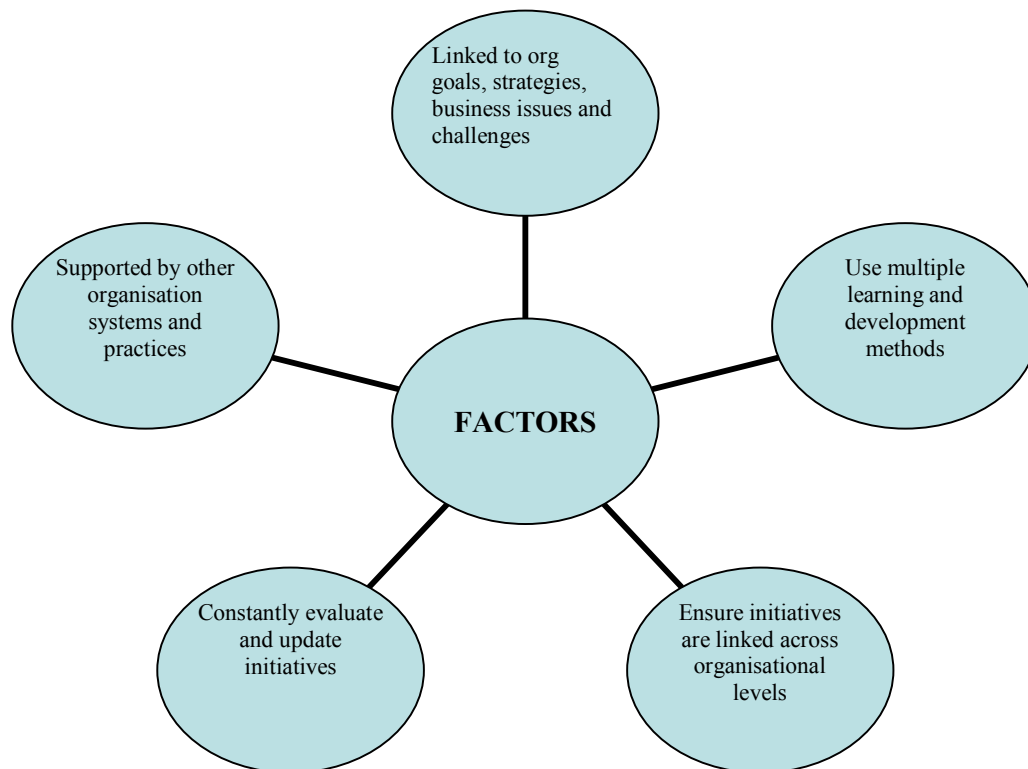


Figure 2.1 **Factors associated with successful leadership development initiatives** (Antonakis, Cianciolo & Sternberg, 2004)

As discussed earlier, the key criteria in selecting suitable initiatives is to identify a common objective and ensure a clear alignment with the organisation's goals, strategies, business issues and challenges. All initiatives must be supported by other organisation systems and practices in order to achieve face validity and acceptance.

Key consideration is to ensure that effective development programmes in organisations not only address the needs of the organisation but also consider the needs, goals and characteristics of the leaders or potential leaders who participate in those development programmes (Antonakis et al., 2004). To assist in meeting this criteria, multiple development methods should be used.

Most initiatives in organisations are still being introduced and implemented on a trial-and-error basis and it is important for these initiatives to be evaluated regularly to ensure that they are meeting the set objectives. A further consideration is that with the constantly changing

environment, the objectives of the organisation may change, thus impacting on the leadership competencies required as well as the suitability of the initiatives. To correct this concern, it is essential for these initiatives to be regularly updated.

A number of critical steps should be followed in developing an effective leadership programme. Figure 2.2 highlights these steps accordingly.

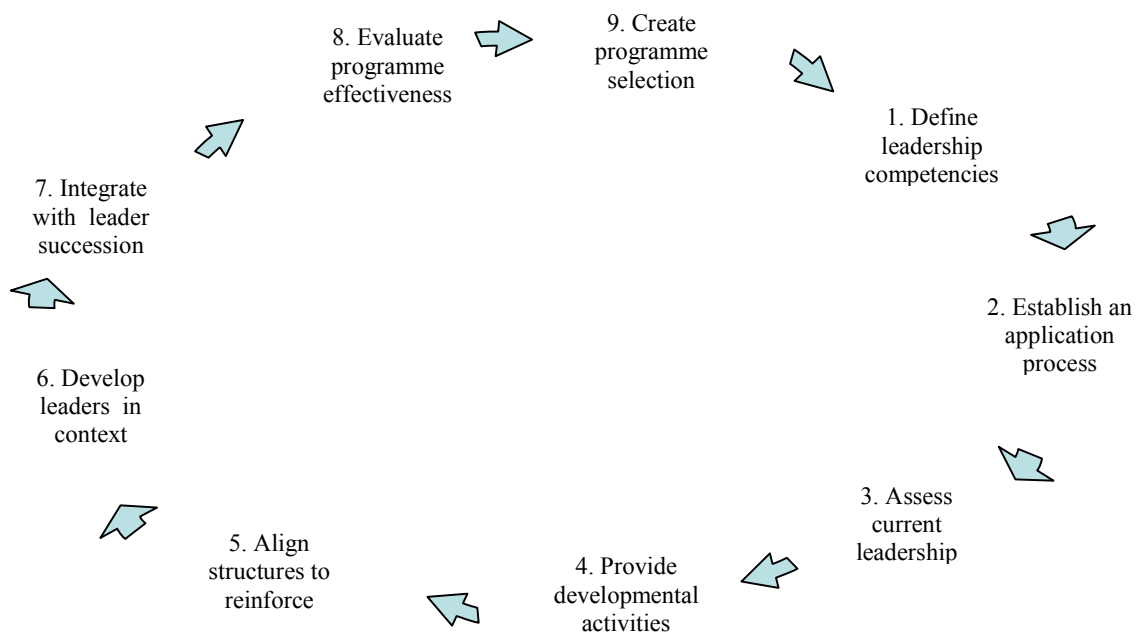


Figure 2.2 **Steps in developing successful leadership development programmes**
(Pernick, 2001)

Clearly it is not a simple selection process of what is the quickest and most cost-effective method of developing future leaders. Although utility of the initiatives is important, the process highlighted above should be carefully followed to ensure buy-in and commitment. The first and most critical step is the organisation's focus on defining the leadership competencies they believe form the basis of effective leaders. Thereafter an application process should be finalised and current leadership assessed. This will assist the organisation to identify potential development gaps as well as developmental activities to address these gaps. These activities need to be aligned with the structure of the organisation, once again with the objectives and organisational context and critically in line with the leader succession plan in place. With this,

the effectiveness of the programme can be evaluated and organisations will then be empowered to select the most appropriate initiatives (Pernick, 2001).

The basis of leadership development initiatives should focus on helping individuals to achieve personal development and intrapersonal competency, identified as the key factors in effective leadership development (Antonakis et al., 2004; Kur & Bunning, 2002). To achieve this, self-awareness and feedback are essential and 360-degree feedback has been described as a powerful way in which to improve the quality of leadership and management (Ryan et al., 2000).

A clear definition of and an explanation of the components and relative strengths and weaknesses of the 360-degree feedback process are provided in the following section.

2.3 DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALISING 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

360-degree feedback systems have according to Valle and Bozeman (2002), been advocated as impacting positively on both individual and organisational performance. Many organisations are therefore using these systems for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to management development, succession planning, performance management and general cultural assessment (Church & Bracken, 1997). According to Fletcher (2001), changes in organisation structures have created conditions where other sources of performance feedback such as 360-degree feedback, have not only become more popular but also increasingly necessary. For the purpose of this study, 360-degree feedback needs to be clearly defined.

2.3.1 Defining 360-degree feedback

According to Lepsinger and Lucia (1997), 360-degree feedback is often referred to as multirater, multisource feedback and full circle appraisal, and is the process of obtaining feedback, on relevant competencies through the ranking or rating method, from various sources inside or outside the organisation (Brett & Atwater, 2001; Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). These sources most often include colleagues, managers, subordinates and customers (raters) and afford participants (ratee) the opportunity to compare the ratees own perceptions of their performance on certain competencies with important raters in the work environment (Maurer et al., 2002). Wimer

(2002) describes the real power behind this concept as a rare opportunity for employees to receive honest feedback on how they are perceived.

With the ultimate aim being to increase participants' self-awareness Salam, Cox and Sims (1997) and Van der Heijden and Nijhof (2004) state that this will result not only in altered behaviour to improve job performance but also increase dialogue between colleagues. Intrapersonal effectiveness seemingly has an impact on the individual's interpersonal development.

2.3.2 The purpose of 360-degree feedback: self-awareness

Feedback has been identified as the key ingredient in developing both self-insight and interpersonal insight (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995) with the most obvious goal of 360-degree feedback being, according to Atwater and Waldman (1998), to increase an individual's level of self-awareness.

Self-awareness is defined by Church and Bracken (1997) as a cognitive process of reflection, ultimately resulting in greater levels of awareness of an individual's own actions as well as the consequences of those actions for others. The aim is to reduce the incongruence between an individual's own perceptions and those of others and ensure that individuals are equipped to make critical changes in their work behaviour, ultimately resulting in improved performance (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Fletcher, 2001, Wimer, 2000).

The concept of self-awareness can be linked to the social comparison theory initially formulated by Festinger (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999) which states that individuals want to be sure about their individual and subjective opinions and abilities. Since there seems to be an objective standard in this field, the certainty lies in relevant comparisons with relevant others. Hence, the idea is that if employees are armed with a better self-awareness, they will be able to make important changes in their work behaviour (Wimer, 2002). In support of this, Yammarino and Atwater (1997) emphasise that constructive feedback should assist in changing or maintaining appropriate on-the-job behaviours and attitudes.

This feedback is then able to ensure that, in our proactive and ever-changing organisations, leaders are able to adapt effectively (Armandi et al., 2003). A possible reason for this is that self-awareness improves an individual's self-regulation which according to Sosik, Potosky and Jung (2002), is an individual's ability to readily adapt to a variety of organisational requirements and contexts in order to maximise effectiveness. Evidence from various settings has further demonstrated an association between self-awareness and managerial success (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000).

Organisations need to ensure that the 360-degree feedback process is perceived as allowing for constructive feedback to be provided in a climate in which one's growth is fostered and there is room for improving one's weaknesses without immediate negative consequences (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004). Organisations therefore need to understand, as explained by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004), the distinction between using 360-degree feedback for developmental versus evaluative purposes. Prior to providing a more detailed explanation of the differences, it is important to highlight that the key differentiator of the above stated purposes is ownership of the data.

2.3.3 Differentiating between the evaluative and developmental purpose of 360-degree feedback

Although 360-degree feedback is mostly carried out for developmental purposes, Yammarino and Atwater (1997) confirm it provides valuable information for appraisals. Fletcher and Baldry (2000) support this statement by indicating that there is a desirable trend to use 360-degree feedback as standard in formal performance appraisals. A brief outline of the differences in the uses of 360-degree feedback is provided in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 The difference between 360-degree feedback for appraisal and development purposes (Huggett, 1998)

	Using for appraisal (evaluative)	Using for development (developmental)
Emphasis	Assessment of performance	Personal development
Participation	Compulsory	Voluntary
Respondents	Manager has right to veto	Subject selects respondents
Report	Manager has access	Subject receives report – confidential
Feedback	Manager requires training to interpret feedback	Subject receives support in feedback interpretation
Outcome	Agreement on the assessment of current performance and targets for improvement	Development plan

Although 360-degree feedback is becoming a popular source of appraisal, a study conducted by Pollack and Pollack (1996) found that managers valued upward feedback for developmental purposes but did not regard it as appropriate for pay and promotion decisions. Bettenhausen and Fedor (1997) support this based on the strength of their findings of more positive responses for the developmental use of peer and upward feedback. The scores of the raters were also found to be similar when used for developmental purposes compared to a lack of consistency in scores when the 360-degree process was used for evaluative purposes (Garavan, Morley and Flynn, 1997).

Other studies have indicated that in many instances organisations introducing 360-degree feedback for evaluative purposes have discarded it within two years (Fletcher, 2001). However, it is important to note that even when used for development, it is still an assessment tool. Cacioppe and Albrecht (2000) emphasise the need people have to receive an assessment of some kind as a starting point from which they can improve the quality of their job performance and their contribution to the organisation’s objectives. A study conducted by Meyer and Odendaal (1999) supports this in that it found that 78 percent of employees are satisfied with the 360-degree feedback system as a developmental assessment tool and rated it as fair, accurate, credible and motivational.

A number of essential factors should be considered when using 360-degree feedback for development. These include integrating the feedback into other training and development

systems in the organisation, ensuring that employees receive a balanced set of feedback and choosing an appropriate instrument (Garavan et al., 1997).

As is the case of any measurement and assessment tool, 360-degree feedback also has number of advantages and disadvantages.

2.3.4 The advantages and challenges of using 360-degree feedback as a developmental tool

One of the most obvious advantages is that 360-degree feedback provides rateses/ individuals/managers with information on how they are perceived by different groups with special insights (Luthans & Peterson, 2003). It often provides far more valuable and reliable ratings than those of a single supervisor (Facteau, Facteau, Schoel, Russell & Poteet, 1998). When used for development, the confidentiality of the results allows individuals to identify areas for development without the pressure of alternative implications (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995). These are related instead to the evaluative process which impacts pay and promotion decisions. Additionally, McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) explain the reduced potential for bias and the inclusion of previously untapped sources of feedback. 360-degree feedback has also been termed a morale booster in organisations, and respondents are only too pleased to have an opportunity to give their own comments and opinions (Fletcher, 2001). Managers are also better able to establish, as per Cooper and Schmitt (1995), an element of reciprocity with subordinates and co-workers serving in return as sources of feedback and reinforcement. Thus participative cultures focused on improving work output are created and organisations are able to reap the benefits of a high involvement workforce, with access to individual development needs and performance thresholds (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001).

Being a fairly new trend, there are still a number of challenges facing the effective use of the 360-degree feedback process. The first of these is that, although one of the benefits is to obtain information from a number of different sources, there is also a concern identified by Luthans and Peterson (2003), namely that the overwhelming amount of information presented to the ratee is often difficult to process and reconcile effectively. This indicates a clear need for help and guidance. Time and money for implementation and preparation remain ongoing challenges, as

does the complexity of the administrative tasks related to the process and the potential risk for the raters in terms of establishing unrealistic expectations or creating conflict between managers and staff (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995). The inconsistency among raters and individuals' ability to integrate different perceptions is still one of the challenges facing most participants. A better understanding of the role different raters have in the process is vital.

2.4 RATERS : THE SOURCES OF FEEDBACK

There are four common sources of feedback including the self, peers, managers and subordinates (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). Customers have recently been introduced as an additional source of feedback in an effort to establish interdependence and ensure a competitive advantage (Testa, 2002).

2.4.1 Self-ratings

Self-ratings refer to the practice whereby the ratee must rate his or her own performance (Lepsinger & Lucia, 1997). Most commonly known to be the lenient rating, McCarthy and Garavan (2001) explain that these ratings are often more inflated than ratings from other sources and tend to have a negative correlation with others' ratings (Valle & Bozeman, 2002). According to Cooper and Schmitt (1995), although this may enhance a manager's attention to the results and his or her desire to use them to establish direction for development, scepticism about the inflation, unreliability and bias evident in these ratings continues to be a concern (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004). Yammarino and Atwater (1997) highlight a further concern that inflated self-ratings often cause some individuals to ignore or discount criticism or failure which impacts their performance negatively. However, an important benefit is that it increases ratee participation in the feedback process, and in turn, influences their commitment to performance goals and the acceptance of criticism (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001).

2.4.2 Peer ratings

Although peer ratings often tend to be far lower than self-ratings, they are fast becoming one of the most valued sources of appraisal as opposed to the usual supervisor ratings (McCarthy &

Garavan, 2000). This is according to Jones and Bearley (1996), a direct consequence of organisation's increased focus on self-managed work teams and flatter structures. Peer feedback provides insight into how the manager behaves in team situations as well as the influencing behaviours that serve to gain commitment when no direct authority can be exercised (Lepsinger & Lucia, 1997).

Peer ratings also afford raters an opportunity to observe ratees' performance, and have a higher reliability as well as constructive and predictive validity (Valle & Bozeman, 2002). However, the user's lack of acceptance or the potential risk that ratings are biased because of friendship or a rater's motivation, as well as the possibility of error due to leniency and the halo effect are common potential pitfalls (Valle & Bozeman, 2002). Two additional concerns were highlighted by McCarthy and Garavan (2001) as being the influence of good relationships with the managers as well as self-serving bias, which refers to an individual's attempt to alter his or her evaluations of others to ensure they are seen in a more positive light.

To counter some of these pitfalls, Garavan et al.(1997) suggest that peers who are selected as raters should consist be those who interact frequently with the employee and are likely to provide constructive as opposed to only positive or negative feedback.

2.4.3 Subordinate ratings

Subordinate ratings were found to be the most highly correlated across dimensions when compared with other sources (Scullen, Mount & Judge, 2003). Affording subordinates the opportunity to provide feedback to their superiors, contributes to both individual and organisational development (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). This is because, as Garavan et al., (1997) explains, subordinates are well positioned to view and evaluate leadership behaviours and may therefore be a more accurate source of information. Cacioppe and Albert (2000) state that managers receiving feedback from subordinates demonstrated increased skills and were therefore the ones who were most likely to advance in the organisation. A number of additional benefits are associated with subordinate ratings namely: impacting on performance, resulting in improvement thereof; lowering the overall susceptibility to halo and leniency errors; higher

reliability; an opportunity to observe performance and ensure greater predictive validity (Valle & Bozeman, 2002).

Subordinate ratings also present individuals with significant changes because, as many employees might view upward assessment as overstepping the boundary of what subordinates should do in the workplace and therefore perceive this as undermining the supervisor's authority (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). Perceptions that subordinates are not capable of rendering accurate performance information are yet another factor which, according to Valle and Bozeman (2002), demonstrates that these ratings are better accepted when used for developmental as opposed to evaluative purposes.

2.4.4 Supervisor ratings

Supervisors have often been identified as the most reliable rating source because they are considered to be more experienced at viewing performance objectively and having better opportunities to view and assess behaviour (Gregarus & Robie, 1998). It is interesting to note that Valle and Bozeman (2002) have indicated that although peers and supervisors often focus on different job dimensions, the interrater agreement between them is relatively high.

Inconsistencies among raters is still a challenge many participants face in the use of 360-degree feedback as a process in development. A lack of understanding of these discrepancies often results in misinterpretation, resistance to using the information appropriately for development or the perception that the process is invalid and not credible. A clear explanation of the discrepancies should be provided to all participants.

2.4.5 Discrepancies between ratings

Evidence shows that intercorrelations between different rating sources were found to be generally low, resulting in inconsistencies with the way in which managers are rated (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; McCauley & Moxley, 1996). This has been attributed to raters not being trained in assessment or the prominence of various rating errors including leniency and the halo effect. Other reasons include the over commitment of raters to the focal person, resulting in a

failure to participate in providing accurate feedback (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999). Inconsistencies in the way managers are rated are therefore common, and, according to McCauley and Moxley (1996), mainly dependent on the amount and level of exposure the rater has with the manager, the behaviour being rated and the different expectations different raters may have of the manager.

In summary, the lack of uniformity in the ratings of different raters may be a challenge, but individuals need to interpret discrepancies taking the above factors into consideration. Achieving self-other agreement is an important element of 360-degree feedback as a development process because an individual's reaction to the results of the 360-degree feedback results impacts on the degree of effort he or she places on their development (Valle & Bozeman, 2002). Clearly then, careful attention should be paid to ensuring that the 360-degree feedback process is managed effectively in the organisation, providing clarity on the process, results and development aim.

2.5 THE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The amount of preparation required to implement a 360-degree feedback process coupled with the number of options available is often surprising to most organisations. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has conceptualised the process into six phases as depicted in the figure below.

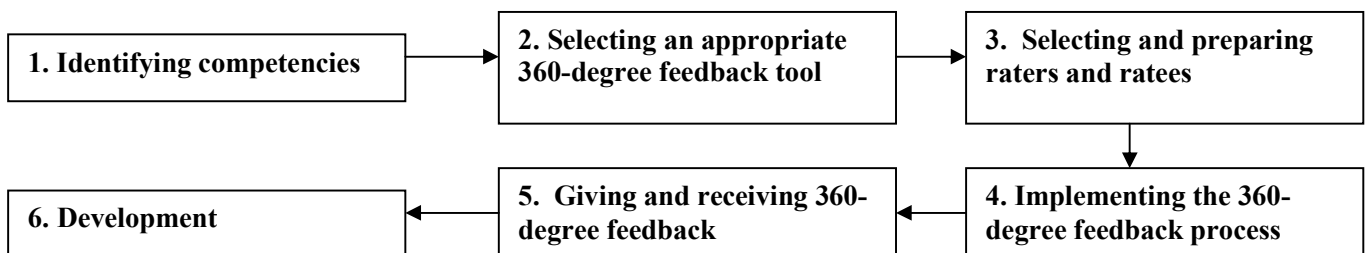


Figure 2.3 **The 360-degree feedback process** (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995; Garavan et al., 1997; Huggett, 1998; Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; Theron, 2000; Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004; Ward, 1997)

2.5.1 Phase 1: identifying competencies

The first and most critical phase in the process is to identify the competencies that are appropriate and relevant to the organisation. The common practice is to hire an external consultant qualified to facilitate the process of identifying the leadership competencies. The more traditional approach was to ensure that competencies relevant to the job were identified from a detailed job analysis (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995). However, the process is now initiated with the external consultant interviewing members of the executive team and other managers in the organisation in order to highlight any business issues they think are critical to the organisation's future success. The identified issues are consolidated by the external consultant and a list of the potential competencies leaders require to cope and address the issues is formulated and presented to the executive team and managers. It is at this stage in the process that competencies are reviewed, changed, added and deleted to ensure that the organisation finalises a model of relevant leadership competencies focusing on between four to eight primary competencies (Huggett, 1998). Organisations are encouraged to focus on behaviour and not only general traits when completing this process because, according to Garavan et al., (1997) these behaviours flow from the organisation's vision and values.

As the competencies are rated or ranked by individuals, behavioural statements reflecting the selected competencies are generated by the management team. It is these behavioural statements that form the foundation of the item content and help to develop the rating/ranking 360-degree feedback assessment. For the purpose of this study, the assessment will be known as the 360-degree feedback instrument and the behavioural statements/competencies requiring rating/ranking will be known as items.

2.5.2 Phase 2: selecting an appropriate 360-degree feedback instrument

The 360-degree feedback instrument may be selected from existing generically developed instruments or instruments may be developed specifically for the organisation. However, the instrument that is selected is of critical importance in the 360 degree process (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999). Although generic instruments have the benefit of being standardised, according to Cacioppe and Albrecht (2000), they still have a number of other advantages

including reliability, repeatability and comparison against norms. However, the risk associated with these instruments, is that if the competencies measured do not reflect the vision and values of the organisation, the process will fail to achieve the required organisational outcomes (Cacioppe & Albrecht, 2000).

Although the instruments may vary in length, Garavan et al., (1997) caution against those that are too long and recommend a completion time of around 15 minutes. This is because raters often only partially complete instruments, especially if they are rating more than one ratee. Hence the instrument should be concise yet meaningful, with descriptive contents to provide sufficient information for the rater to understand the competency being assessed (Theron, 2000).

Ratings should also be observable and objective and reflect both the present and the future in order to improve reliability and predictive validity (Garavan et al., 1997). Cacioppe and Albrecht (2000) propose the use of a seven to ten point rating scale. However, the method of ranking competencies into specific categories has also recently been introduced in an effort to avoid bias and reduce the negative impact of the 360-degree feedback results.

2.5.3 Phase 3: selecting and preparing raters and ratees

To ensure that raters are empowered and feedback is accepted, Becton and Schraeder (2004) suggest that participants (ratees) be solely responsible for their selection. Raters should be chosen on the strength of their knowledge of the ratee and what is expected in his or her job (Theron, 2000). It is difficult to determine the ideal number of raters but Garavan et al. (1997) recommend that they range from between four to ten. In addition, it is essential that the raters understand the nature and purpose of the process and be assured of confidentiality, resulting in their commitment to the process. This will provide valid and useful responses.

2.5.4 Phase 4: implementing the 360-degree feedback process

The 360-degree process is a time-consuming and costly process and a number of guidelines should be taken into account when organisations implement such a process.

Table 2.3 Guidelines to follow when implementing the 360-degree feedback process (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Cooper & Schmitt, 1995; Facticeau et al., 1998; Wimer, 2002)

Guidelines to follow when implementing the 360-degree process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the reason why the organisation wishes to introduce the process. Always introduce initially for developmental purposes only.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define how the process will be introduced – who will start and how much top management commitment has been identified.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the process encourages everyone to participate and do not single out individuals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the legitimate needs of all the stakeholders involved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a clear contract with the participants in terms of confidentiality – raters need to understand that their ratings will be anonymous.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage participants to give a considerable amount of thought to their selection of raters. Managers may select subordinates or allow a voluntary selection process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that raters are adequately trained in understanding the 360-degree process and rating/ranking method.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline communication methods, that is: initial workshops to communicate process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the nature of support that will be provided to participants and empower them to seek support and feedback. Remember that support is a key factor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sensitive to the reactions of the individuals participating.

It is critical that before implementing the process, all individuals participating should understand the process and the purpose of the results. To really gain the necessary buy-in and commitment, as well as to improve the participants' willingness and interest to provide accurate and useful ratings, Wimer (2002) suggests involving employees in the design of the feedback process.

A further essential element impacting on the success of the process is ensuring that the processes is supported by senior management who, should themselves participate in giving and receiving feedback, thus encouraging their managers to do the same (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001).

2.5.5 Phase 5: giving and receiving 360-degree feedback

Ratings on their own do not convey sufficient information for people to improve. In order for staff to develop and learn, they need to know what they need to change, where they have fallen short and what to do (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004). According to Wimer (2002) feedback providers should be selected carefully to ensure that they represent those who know the person best.

A feedback loop outlined by Ward (1997) entails providing feedback to participants from observation to briefing, questionnaire completion, report processing, feedback, reflection, action plan and changed behaviour. Providing and receiving feedback is a sensitive process and a number of critical factors need to be considered including the feedback provider, the feedback environment, the nature of the feedback and the target reactions of the recipient. Figure 2.3 outlines important elements to consider in each of these factors.

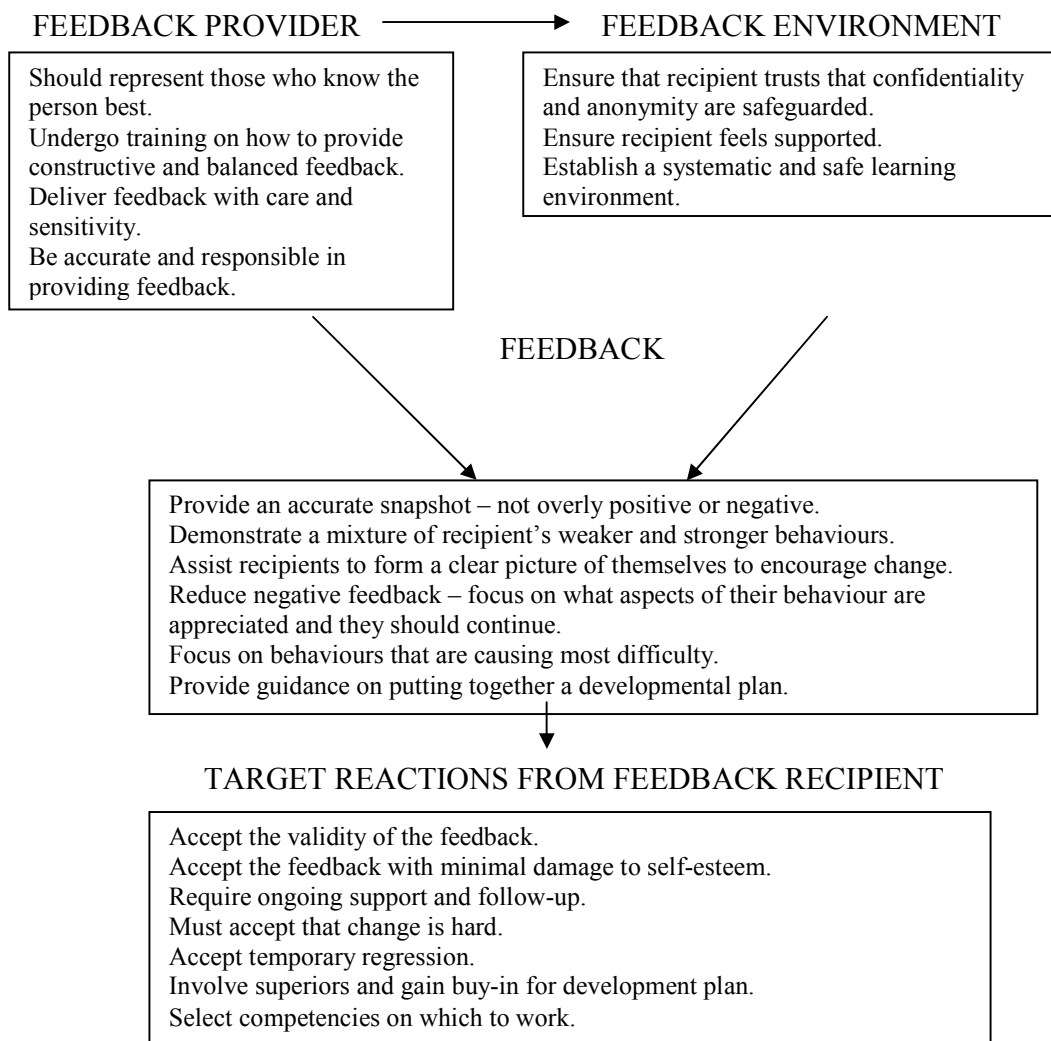


Figure 2.4 **Key elements in a successful feedback process** (McCauley & Moxley, 1996; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004; Ward, 1997; Wimer, 2002)

2.5.6 Phase 6: development

Managers' efforts to develop their skills after receiving feedback are regarded by Maurer and Palmer (1999) as critical to the success of the intervention. They will typically select two to four competencies to focus on and create a one-page development plan containing categories such as resources, target dates, progress review or completion (Emiliani, 2003). Caution should be exercised because even the best plans may fall short, and McCauley and Moxley (1996) explain the need for managers to receive organisation and direct supervisor support in the implementation and follow through of their development plans.

The contention that 360-degree feedback is somehow more objective and accurate than other appraisal systems is difficult to support. According to Fletcher (2001), however, it is certainly fairer, in the sense that it represents more than one viewpoint on an individual's performance, and also allows for a more rounded picture to be presented. The assessment of the validity and reliability of the 360 degree method is a key point of discussion.

2.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK INSTRUMENT AND PROCESS

The instruments used in the 360-degree feedback process show evidence of a good internal consistency and interrater reliability (Hazucha, Helzlett & Schneider, 1993). This convergence between "other" ratings, as stated by Valle and Bozeman (2002), enhances the reliability and validity of any inferences or decisions based on those ratings. According to McCauley and Moxley (1996), evidence of validity is also built in by showing that the dimensions assessed by the instrument are indeed important for effectiveness in managerial work. This is further supported by Fecteau et al.'s (1998) study which indicates that the psychometric properties of these instruments have a moderate, convergent, discriminant and predictive validity.

There is still a considerable amount of bias inherent in the process which needs to be acknowledged. Rating errors constitute one of the many possible forms of bias in 360 measures because, as stated by Fletcher, Baldry and Cunningham-Snell (1998), measures of own level of competency are different from those of other raters. Error can enter into scores when items are

too vague, when different raters interpret the meaning of items differently and when current mood influences raters (McCauley & Moxley, 1996). Other forms of bias include the halo effect, often encountered by supervisor ratings, the leniency effect when rated by peers and impression management during self-assessments (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997; Wimer, 2002). Suggestions by Van der Heijden and Nijhof (2004) to improve the validity of self-assessments include validating these against external criteria, the individual's previous experience in self-assessments and guaranteeing anonymity.

In a study by Atkins and Wood (2002), it was found that the results of 360-degree feedback and those of an assessment centre were highly correlated. One may therefore conclude that the 360-degree feedback process is a valid and useful process that can be used to assess managerial and leadership competence (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998). However, in using divergent feedback from different raters for development purposes, Valle and Bozeman (2002) caution that current systems should be treated as being inherently unreliable and be viewed as a useful snapshot of individual work-related behaviour.

Hence because 360-degree feedback is a relatively new process in most organisations today, caution should be exercised in ensuring that the process is not used in isolation and that discrepancies between raters should be appropriately interpreted and utilised to assist in the development of leaders. A number of variables still impact the effectiveness of the 360-degree feedback process as highlighted in the next section.

2.7 VARIABLES IMPACTING ON THE 360-DEGREE PROCESS

According to Fletcher and Baldry (2000), there are five important sources of influence on an individual's self-assessment and the ratings received from external providers. These include biographical characteristics, individual characteristics, situational or contextual characteristics, cognitive processes and job-relevant experience.

2.7.1 Biographical characteristics

Because females seem to be more self-aware than males (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000) they have more accurate self-perceptions (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). According to Alimo-Metcalfe (1998), females also tend to rate themselves lower than their male counterparts, finding it more difficult to identify their strengths. In terms of leadership styles, ratings often indicated that women tend to be perceived as transformational, regardless of the gender of the rating subordinate (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998). Females showed greater change in competencies when the process was followed up a second time, as did younger individuals as opposed to their older counterparts (Hazucha et al., 1993). A study conducted by Fletcher et al. (1998) indicated that the older people become, the more inclined they are to provide positive feedback in their judgement of peers but are less satisfied with the performance of subordinates. Furthermore, Cooper and Schmitt (1995) found evidence that older people are often rated lower than their younger counterparts.

Individuals of minority groups feel that their perceptions may be affected by stereotyping attributions, higher visibility and exaggeration of differences between minority and majority groups (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

2.7.2 Individual characteristics

Self-awareness has been regarded as an individual difference variable in its own right (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). According to Yammarino and Atwater (1997), an individual's ability to self-monitor, coupled with his or her self-consciousness impacts on the accuracy of self-ratings. It is important to note that individuals focus on protecting a positive self-esteem and show defensiveness in attempting to maintain their self-perception against the negative perception others may hold of them (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995).

According to Cooper and Schmitt (1995), the question of impression management needs to be addressed. This includes the process of self-disclosure people follow in order to create and maintain desired impressions. The effect could entail a subordinate who attempts to attribute

performance problems to the manager or rates the manager higher because of previous appraisals in which the manager rated the subordinate highly (Brutus et al., 1998).

Achievement status and locus of control are two additional contributing factors to the way in which ratings are affected (Faction et al., 1998). This is supported by Alimo-Metcalfe (1998) who refers to the tendency individuals have to attribute the negative outcomes of their behaviours to factors outside themselves and positive outcomes to personal attributes.

2.7.3 Context/situational characteristics

According to Cooper and Schmitt (1995,) the way people structure perceptions of both themselves and others is **situationally based**. Ratings are affected by situational control which Alimo-Metcalfe (1998) define as the degree to which managers feel confident and in control of what they are doing. According to Vandenberg, Lance and Taylor (1997), individual's personal conceptualization of what constitutes performance is a function of his or her social perceptions of the ratee and the individual's interaction goals with the particular ratee as a result of his or her position in the organisation.

Yammarino and Atwater (1997) highlight a number of other contextual factors including discrepant job pressures, political processes and prior rating experiences. Additional factors producing bias include the influence of friendship and the amount of contact between self and external raters (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000).

In a study by Brutus et al. (1998), industry differences were found to be a factor that impacted on ratings. These included variations in terms of cultural values, goals, technology, organisation structures, managerial systems and procedures.

Factors inherent in the rating system are further contributors to the rating outcomes. An example is whether or not subordinates have to sign the form (Faction et al., 1998). Often ratees indicate a preference that the raters sign their form, whereas the raters would prefer to remain anonymous. This is especially the case between managers as the ratee and subordinates as the rater.

2.7.4 Cognitive and affective processes

This refers to the way in which raters and ratees gather, store, process and retrieve information as well as certain attitudes and expectations that influence ratings. Key informants, as explained by Van Der Heijden and Nijhof (2004), may not be able to recall the past accurately. Managers and subordinates are also likely to operate from different frames of reference which, in turn, leads to differences in perceptions of behaviour (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998).

According to Antonini and Park (2001), rater affect has an impact on the results of certain ratings. This includes positive and negative affect towards the individual being rated, responsibility and accountability in the organisation and the manner in which certain qualities are attributed to the individual being rated.

2.7.5 Job-relevant experience

The relevant amount of knowledge and experience raters have of the job the ratee is responsible for influences the rating process. Raters form their perceptions of ratee level of competence based on their experience of the ratee's past successes and failures (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Hence raters who have greater familiarity with the job and the ratee often appear to provide far more accurate ratings (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004).

In conclusion, there is evidence that a number of factors impact on the effectiveness and outcome of the 360-degree feedback process. However, most critical to the acceptance and useful implementation of the 360-degree feedback results is the reaction of the ratees.

2.8 REACTIONS TO 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK PROCESS

In a study conducted by Fecteau et al. (1998), it was stated that understanding a leader's reactions to 360-degree feedback is critical because both research and theory suggest that the way in which a leader reacts to 360-degree feedback is a determining factor in whether or not he or she will take action to improve his or her performance.

According to Jansen and Vloeberghs (1999), four reactions can be elicited. These include the employee neglecting the feedback; taking only positive feedback into account; being motivated only by negative feedback; or being interested in feedback given by someone who is regarded as important. Research has also shown that the more complex the feedback, the more likely recipients will be to distort it by focusing on results that are similar to their self-assessment and ignoring those which are not (Meyer & Odendaal, 1999).

At this stage it is important to link individuals' reactions to the level or degree of self-awareness they have when receiving the feedback. According to Fletcher and Baldry (2000), individuals with a high level of self-awareness will be able to incorporate comparisons of their behaviour into their self-perceptions with ease. However, individuals with low self-awareness are more likely to ignore or discount any negative feedback about themselves and often react with a negative attitude towards work.

Source credibility and feedback climate are two factors that are known to influence reactions to feedback. Regarding source credibility, Fecteau et al. (1998) state that the level of rater competence influences the degree to which credibility is attributed to the results of the 360-degree process. Feedback climate relates to the receptivity with which individuals (ratees) can seek and feel comfortable seeking performance-relevant information hence, if it is encouraged and rewarded in the organisation, individuals will feel more comfortable seeking the information (Funderberg & Levy, 1997).

Evidence presented by Fletcher et al. (1998) suggests that managers who receive feedback often state that this feedback has a powerful impact on them. A study conducted by Smither and Walker (2001) found that ratees who received more favourable narrative comments from their direct reports, also received a more favourable annual review from their managers. Research also indicates that when managers received positive multisource feedback, this resulted in lower turnover and higher service quality in work groups (Church, 2000). A number of factors impact on feedback receptivity as highlighted in the table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4 Factors impacting on feedback acceptance and use (Brett & Atwater, 2001; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; London & Smither, 1995; Maurer et al., 2002; Smither, London & Reilly, 2005; VandeWall, Cron & Slocum, 2001)

Factor	Description
Characteristics of the feedback	This is based on identifying whether the feedback is positive or negative. Demographic factors influence raters, perception including race, gender, age experience and education. Negative reactions are also elicited when feedback focuses on personal characteristics as opposed to task behaviours.
Initial reactions to feedback	If initial reactions are extremely negative, feedback will be rejected and disregarded; dependent on how unfavourably feedback is perceived to be.
Feedback orientation	People high on feedback orientation had more positive emotions after receiving feedback and this impacts on improved ratings from direct reports.
Personality	High self-monitors, extroverts, openness to improvement are more likely to seek feedback.
Beliefs about change	Although feedback recipients may agree that change is required, they may not believe it is possible. This is influenced by level of self-esteem and entity theory.
Perceived need to change	Overraters who receive feedback often realise there is a need to change.
Goal setting and related constructs	Feedback alone does not result in changed behaviour. <i>Promotion regulatory focus</i> (orients a person towards attaining positive outcomes) - <i>prevention regulatory focus</i> (orients a person toward minimising negative outcomes) Three factor model to goal orientation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Learning goal orientation</i>: Focuses on becoming more competent by mastering new situations and learning from experience. - <i>Proving goal orientation</i>: Focuses on demonstrating competence and gaining favourable judgements from others. - <i>Avoiding goal orientation</i>: Focuses on avoiding negative outcomes and judgements from others.
Use of feedback	Development - administrative purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Development</i>: More likely to produce positive outcomes as data can be examined in a private, unthreatening manner. - <i>Administrative</i>: Affected by rater bias.
Taking appropriate action	Ensuring competencies for development are identified and a relevant development plan prepared. It must be understood that those who receive negative feedback may require different follow-up compared with those who receive positive feedback.

Organisational factors have shown to have a significantly greater impact on attitudes towards 360-degree feedback than individual factors. Attention should be drawn to three factors in particular, namely the cultural readiness of an organisation, support for individuals seeking feedback and the nature of supervisory style (Church & Bracken, 1997).

In addition, research also indicates that feedback received from different raters is significantly associated with one's attitude towards the feedback programme. A study by Maurer et al. (2002) demonstrates that the higher an individual is rated by peers and subordinates, the more positive his or her attitude towards the feedback intervention. However, ratings by peers were regarded as

those causing the least impact on participants. According to Brett and Atwater (2001), this can be attributed to the fact that participants often have the opportunity to select the peers they wish to rate or they have different expectations of the ratings they receive from their peers. However, an interesting reaction in the study by Brett and Atwater (2001) was that participants did not report negative reactions to lower ratings from direct reports, possibly because they may have expected that owing to some interpersonal issues or performance-related issues, that subordinates would rate them low. It would seem that because subordinates and peers are the key resources in a manager's effectiveness, feedback elicited from these sources will be perceived in a positive light. Brutus, London and Martinueau (1999) supported this and concluded that a manager's selection goals for development generally follow the key areas identified by subordinates and peers as opposed to those identified by management.

In summary, figure 2.5 below outlines the key reactions most participants encounter when receiving 360-degree feedback as well as the driving forces behind these reactions.

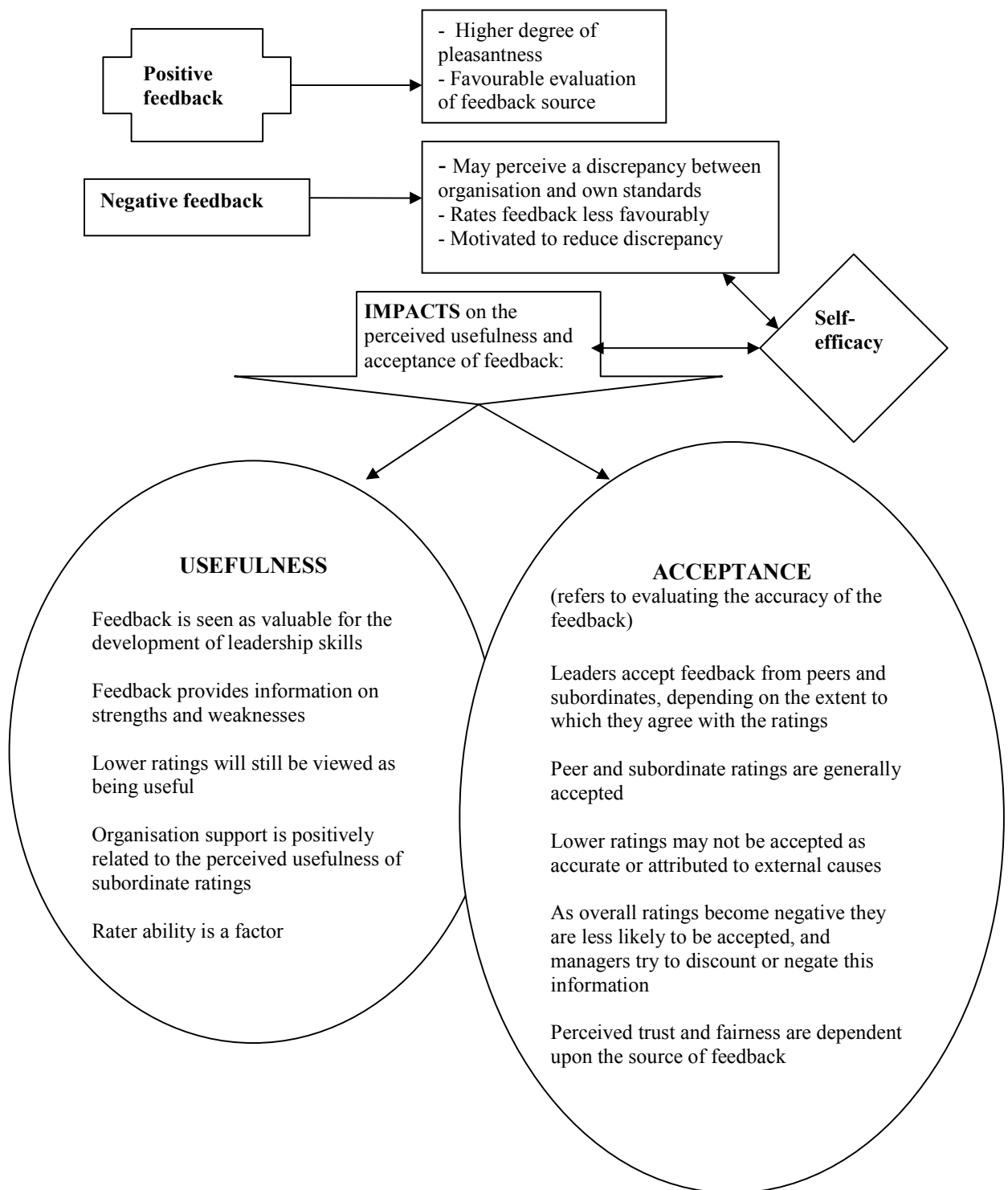


Figure 2.5 **Reactions to 360-degree feedback** (Facteau et al., 1998; Maurer et al., 2002; Sosik et al., 2002; Wimer, 2002)

It is therefore evident that negative and positive feedback will elicit different reactions, and a number of characteristics influence whether feedback will be viewed as useful and acceptable. Participants' attitude towards the process is also influenced by their self-efficacy and the extent to which they are confident in their ability to improve their skills (Maurer et al., 2002). The most natural reaction to becoming self-aware when receiving feedback is self-regulation. According to Cooper and Schmitt (1995) this is the adjustment of behaviour by individuals to align the perceptions of their behaviour with a particular standard. At times, defence mechanisms may be used, the most common ones being: denial or resignation, giving up, self-promoting behaviour, rationalisation and attack (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004; Ward, 1997).

In summary, for feedback to be put into practice it must influence the perception of feedback, the acceptance of feedback and the motivation and willingness to use this information in future tasks (Becton & Schraeder, 2004). Hence, it is also evident then that both context and individual characteristics are as stated by Maurer et al., (2002) important influences on attitudes towards a 360-degree feedback system. Feedback should be accepted and viewed as useful because, as stated by Cooper and Schmitt (1995), acceptance of feedback leads to setting meaningful and realistic goals and, in turn, improves performance.

2.9 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Even if one accepts that a number of factors impact on the receptivity of feedback, there is still uncertainty about whether 360-degree feedback leads to improved performance.

Both the feedback and the control theories suggest that when people detect a negative discrepancy between their performance and a standard, they become motivated to reduce that discrepancy (Maurer et al., 2002). This, in turn, influences performance following participation in a 360-degree feedback process which according to Fecteau et al. (1998) is improved provided the relevant managers request input from their co-workers on their development plans. However, Smither et al. (2005) suggest that multiple administrations of a feedback programme may sometimes be required before significant improvements are observed. The moderating factor is self-awareness because it was found that individuals with a higher self-awareness were

generally better performers (Fletcher, 2001). In support of this, Alimo-Metcalfe (1998) indicated that managers who saw themselves as most similar to the way others rated them were also perceived to be the most effective. One may therefore conclude that performance is influenced by a manager's level of self-awareness because the higher the level of self-awareness, the higher a manager's ability to incorporate comparisons of his or her behaviour into their self-perception, perceiving these as being valid and reliable (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000).

It is necessary to emphasise the fact that feedback interventions are not only useful when recipients react to the interventions with favourable attitudes but they also respond to the feedback by pursuing constructive developmental activities designed to enhance their skills (Maurer et al., 2002).

2.9.1 Formulating a development plan

Feedback is an important unfreezing process that enhances self-awareness. However, according to McCauley and Moxley (1996), it is only the beginning of the development process. Hence, in order to effect behaviour change, it is essential for the participants to take ownership and be responsible for their own development and success (Fletcher, 2001).

Hazucha et al. (1993) proposed a framework for an effective development plan which outlines the following critical steps in the process of behaviour change: assessing needs, assessing behavioural standards, formulating and protecting actions to achieve these standards, learning and expressing new behaviours in the day-to-day environment. Employing multiple strategies to integrate the development plan into their work is essential because managers learn most through the challenges they face at work and from the people with whom they work with (McCauley & Moxley, 1996).

Antonini (1996) suggests further, that in order to ensure an effective development plan, feedback results should be discussed with raters so that specific improvement goals and action plans may be formulated.

Supervisor support is critical during this process, and in a study conducted by Hazucha et al. (1993), it was found that those individuals who received more support from their supervisor reported putting in more effort into their development and engaged in more development activities.

However, as mentioned earlier, the ratee is responsible for his or her own development, and Antonini (1996) suggest four ways to hold managers accountable for responding to their 360-degree feedback appraisal results. These require managers to share and discuss results with raters, share results with immediate supervisors, include the results in the annual 360 degree appraisal and link absence of improvement to some type of negative consequence.

2.10 INTEGRATION

In a proactive effort to remain competitive, organisations require leaders who are able to initiate and adapt to change. Since leaders are required to develop certain critical leadership competencies in order to meet these objectives, a clear focus on building leadership capacity in organisations has emerged.

Increased emphasis on and implementation of leadership development initiatives are evident. For the purpose of this study, leadership development has been conceptualised as having one aim, comprising assisting potential future leaders to first develop intrapersonal competence. This will form the foundation to enable them to further develop their interpersonal competence and improve their ability to fulfil leadership roles and responsibilities.

Strict criteria for the selection and implementation of leadership development initiatives include first ensuring appropriate identification of the leadership competencies required. Linked to this is the need to ensure an alignment with the individual and the organisation goals in selecting and implementing an effective initiative.

The 360-degree feedback process has therefore emerged, amongst other initiatives, as a popular tool for leadership development. This multisource feedback process affords individuals an opportunity to receive feedback on their leadership competencies from a range of different raters

including peers, subordinates, customers and line managers. Although receiving feedback has always posed many challenges, this provides individuals with guidelines on their strengths and development gaps. As required in building the foundation of an effective leader, this process helps individuals to increase in level of self-awareness.

Although 360-degree feedback may be used for evaluative purposes, the focus of this research study highlights the use of the 360-degree feedback process for developmental purposes only, and identifies six phases in the process.

The identification of competencies forms the first and most important phase of the process facilitating the second stage and ensuring the selection of an appropriate 360-degree feedback instrument. Selecting and preparing raters and ratees is part of the third phase. It is essential to complete this phase prior to implementing the fourth phase, the 360-degree feedback process. Once the process has been implemented, the fifth phase during which raters receive feedback kicks in. The final phase involves ratees' efforts to focus their attention on formulating a development plan to address and close the development gaps that have been identified.

Organisations have identified numerous advantages of using the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development. An increase in individual self-awareness, resulting in improved organisational relationships is a key example. However, organisations are still facing a number of challenges such as the applicability of an instrument and rater bias in implementing an effective process.

Nonetheless, the 360-degree feedback process has proven to be a valid and reliable method to use in leadership development, but caution should be exercised against using the instrument in isolation.

As with any development process, a number of factors influence the way in which individuals (ratees) react to the 360-degree feedback process and results. This includes interalia, biographical characteristics (i.e. gender, age and race); individual characteristics (i.e. level of self-awareness); contextual characteristics (i.e. organisational culture); cognitive and affective processes (i.e. how raters and ratees process information and form attitudes); and the level of

job-relevant information both the raters and ratees possess. Rater credibility as well as the type of feedback climate, the feedback provider and the individual's commitment to change are additional factors influencing whether individuals will have a positive or negative reaction to the 360-degree feedback process.

When individuals receive negative feedback, negative reactions are elicited. In response to this, resistance comes to the fore, and these individuals typically perform impression management, or alternatively, adopt defence mechanisms such as denial and rationalisation. Conversely, positive reactions result not only in self-development but also improved relations across the organisation, and seemingly improved performance.

Although the 360-degree feedback process leads to improved performance, it requires the commitment of the individual and organisation to ensure that an appropriate development plan is formulated to address development gaps appropriately.

In conclusion, 360-degree feedback fulfils the role of being an organisational initiative which will result in raising the salience of behaviours and relationships in the organisation and also increasing an employee's participation in decisions and development (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995), ultimately assisting in the development of future leaders.

2.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided background on previous research, views and key elements of the 360-degree feedback process as a leadership development tool. It provided clarity on what leadership and leadership development are for the purpose of this study and conceptualised 360-degree feedback as a process and tool in leadership development.

The next chapter which will explore the research process used in the study in order to promote an understanding of managers' subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed and thick description of the process followed preparing for the research, conducting the research, analysing the data and transforming the raw data into findings (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). Focus group interviews, content analysis and the phases of grounded theory used in this study are discussed in detail.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study was conducted from the positivist paradigm using the interpretative research approach as the researcher attempted to understand the live, subjective experience of the participants (Davis, Nkayama & Martin, 2000). According to Stromquist (2000), the study meets the criteria necessary for qualitative research because the goal of the research was to understand the “subjective experience” of the participants. The inductive process was followed because the researcher commenced with focus group interview coding and progressively developed more abstract, conceptual categories to synthesise, explain and understand the data and necessary relationships (Riley & Love, 2000). As stated by Thorne et al. (2004). The detailed thick description ensures that, the utility and quality of the study is confirmed through the processes inherent in the method used to conduct the study.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The first step in ensuring effective data collection was the selection and composition of the sample used in the research. This was followed by the preparation and implementation of focus group interviews, and the process concluded with the final transcription of the interviews.

3.2.1 Sampling method and sampling frame

The purposive sample was subdivided into two distinct groups. The first group consisted of 10 senior managers who underwent 360-degree feedback as part of a development initiative aimed at encouraging the development of leaders in an organisation. These participants were all at

senior management level and the 360-degree feedback process was initiated and conducted as part of their daily activities and within the work environment.

The second group consisted of three employees at middle management level and only two senior managers who had been selected as part of a focused leadership development initiative in the organisation, the leadership academy. These individuals underwent the 360-degree feedback process in an environment outside of their daily work context in conjunction with many other development-focused initiatives.

A further differentiating factor between these groups included the method used to rate/ rank competencies in the 360-degree feedback process. The sample of senior managers underwent a 360-degree process which involved ranking competencies into three categories, whereas the sample of leadership academy participants' process was that of rating competencies and providing substantiating comments.

Although the sample split was not aimed at achieving the operational aim of the research, it was a form of ensuring conformability of the results, because according to Silverman (2000) this is achieved by constant comparison and inspection of different cases in the emergence and description of conceptual linkages. A further argument for this was to allow for a greater range of generalisability of the results and outcomes of the study (Locke, 2001).

3.2.2 Casing

In alignment with the selected research design, casing, Bogdan and Biklen (1993) confirm that the researcher focused on a multisite case study. This entailed the use of more than one individual manager during the process of understanding the subjective experience and focused on using multiple number of managers split into focus groups. The researcher also operated within the constant comparative method of casing (Bogdan & Biklen, 1993) and through the division of the individual managers into focus groups was able to determine differences and make comparisons in understanding the manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development within the organisational context. The exploration and

description which occurred during this research study through the use of casing, took place through the in depth data collection method of focus group interviews (De Vos et al., 2005).

3.2.3 Focus group interviews

Because there were 15 voluntary participants in total in the sample, they were divided into three focus groups of five participants each, ensuring multiple groups with similar participants for identification of patterns and trends across the groups (Krueger, 1994). The first group consisted of only male senior management, the second of only female senior management and the third focus group, of the leadership academy participants comprising three females and two males.

The reason the senior management sample was split into male and female groups was to ensure homogeneity of the sample and provide an environment in which participants felt more open to communication (Morgan, 1997). This is especially important in a manufacturing organisation which is predominantly male dominated and a society in which females have only recently assumed senior managerial roles. Once again, this split served as a method to ensure conformability (Silverman, 2000). Focus group interviews were conducted on all three groups with the purpose of collecting data to meet the operational aims outlined in chapter 1.

3.2.3.1 Preparation phase: sampling and moderator guide preparation

Voluntary requests for participation in the focus group interviews were sent to all participants. Initially, the researcher aimed at sending the invitations to at least eight employees per group to ensure focus groups consisted of at least four to six participants (Lewis, 2000). A memo was attached to the meeting request briefly explaining the purpose of the focus group interview, the duration of these and a detailed explanation of the confidentiality, confirming that it was not an organisational initiative. Five participants per focus group agreed to participate. The remainder of the invited individuals were unable to attend due to business commitments and short notice.

During this phase, a moderator guide was prepared, as suggested by Greenbaum (1998) to ensure the focus group interviews met the necessary aims of the study (Appendix A). As recommended by Krueger (1988), the focus group interview contained fewer than 10 questions to avoid forcing

participants to provide quick answers that seemed rational or appropriate. The interviews were semi structured in the sense that they had contained a set of open-ended questions. Hence, the style remained open ended and responsive during all three focus group interviews (Berg, 2001). The researcher was now well equipped to commence the research study.

3.2.3.2 Implementation phase: conducting the focus group interviews

The focus groups were initiated with a general introduction of the topic and an explanation of the ground rules to be adhered to in the focus group interview (Doyle, 2004). It was during this phase that the researcher addressed ethical concerns surrounding the confidentiality and anonymity of data collected (Henning, 2004) because this was a real concern for all the participants. Informed consent for taping the focus group interviews, as required by Berg (2001), was obtained verbally, prior to the commencement of the interviews and by voluntary participation in the interview as participants had been notified of the audiotape recording prior to agreeing to participate. The researcher requested that members of the group introduce themselves. This ensured that the researcher was familiar with all the participants and would recognise their voices during transcription. Although a concern posed by Howe and Lewis (1993), namely that formal introductions may hamper the free flow of the discussion, the researcher felt that, in the context of the organisation, some structure would be required by participants to ensure their cooperation and level of comfort with those around them.

As is usual in a semi structured interview, all interviews commenced with general questions and narrowed into the more specific questions aimed at meeting the research outcomes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). However, the central question to all interviews was simply: “what was your subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development?” Detailed interviewer notes were taken during each focus group interview to ensure that the researcher kept record of nonverbal responses, the general atmosphere, seating arrangements and the discussion flow (Henning, 2004).

Prior to commencing, the researcher made it clear to participants that she was not part of the discussion but rather a facilitator wishing to learn from the participants with minimal participation on her part. Initially, most focus groups would discuss the open ended question

looking directly at the researcher for some direction or acknowledgement but, through no reactive and nondirective probing, as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), the researcher facilitated that the conversation flow between the participants and the true nature of the focus groups was achieved.

Using Krueger and Casey's (2000) guidelines, the researcher aimed at ensuring that actual words used by the participants and meanings behind the words were considered; the context was examined to ensure identification of the triggering stimulus; there was a search for internal consistency; the topics that were frequently and extensively discussed and those that were discussed with greater intensity and feeling were identified; responses based on specific experiences were given more weight; and finally, the major findings were highlighted shortly after the focus group interviews had been conducted.

Although the challenge of ensuring that time was appropriately managed (Lewis, 2000), the focus groups moved from the general to specific questions smoothly and consistency across all focus groups was evident.

3.2.3.3 Closing phase: ending the focus group interview

Once the interviews were nearing conclusion, the researcher requested each participant to summarise the key points on their thinking around the topic of the focus group interview (Doyle, 2004). This afforded her with an opportunity to ensure a clear understanding and interpretation of the information gathered during the focus group interview. The researcher then summarised the key elements identified during the interview, and with the consensus of all participants, concluded the session by thanking them for their time as well as offering a copy of the completed research study once it had been submitted.

3.2.3.4 Post focus group interview phase: transcribing the data

All three focus group interviews were transcribed by the researcher, as recommended by Locke (2001), which afforded the researcher an opportunity to gain a real understanding of the data.

For the purpose of the research and in order to meet the operational aims highlighted in the first chapter, the researcher deemed focus group interviews to be sufficient and these were used as the principal source of data in the research process (Morgan, 1997). Data analysis was therefore based on the transcripts of the three focus group interviews as well as the extensive field notes and memos prepared by the researcher.

3.2.3 Strategies to enhance the quality of focus group interviews

In line with Doyle's (2004) recommendation, three groups were formed and interviewed to allow the researcher to investigate concerns, experiences or attitudes/beliefs of a sufficient number of groups to be able to identify patterns. The researcher further complied with Brown's (1999) recommendation and ensured a minimum of four participants in each focus group. The moderator guide that was prepared was used in all three groups and this guaranteed better reliability across the three focus group interviews.

It is essential to note that focus groups do not provide generalisable results, and findings are therefore not applicable to all people similar to the participants. Transferability may then, as suggested by Kritzinger and Barbour (1999), be the most useful measure of validity. The researcher thus ensured that the results were presented in a way that would allow future researchers to judge whether the findings will be applicable in their context. In order to meet the criteria and ensure transferability, copious field notes were taken during the interviews to ensure that notable quotes were recorded, and key points for each question were highlighted and follow-up questions noted. Other factors such as body language and level agreement were also considered (Krueger, 1998).

Questions used were an essential element in ensuring transferential validity and the researcher was careful in terms of the types of questions asked. The focus was on the use of open-ended questions to afford participants the opportunity to describe their experience within parameters but with flexibility. These were focused more on past experience and vague questions requesting understanding. For example "why?" was rarely asked, instead the moderator asked specific questions such as "what are the key factors of leadership development". The researcher often recorded follow-up points and when attempting to involve participants, reflection on mention of

a specific experience or event highlighted in the focus group interview would be made. Following this process, the researcher managed to ensure the reliability of the moderator guide by aligning the discussion with the main research aims. Encouraging the involvement of all participants served the purpose of assisting the validity of the process, providing internal consistency across all three focus groups (Berg, 2001). What is critical to highlight at this stage is that, operating within the paradigm perspectives described in chapter one, although data from the focus groups was potentially incompletely collected (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), De Vos et al. (2005), confirm that what was collected, possibly subject to some constraints, represents the reality of experiences of the group members.

During the data transcription process the researcher incorporated field notes and formulated memos assisting with the identification and clarification of relationships between categories. This captured in essence the elements of the intrinsic case study, with the focus being on understanding the manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development (De Vos et al., 2005).

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the coding process and techniques will be explained as well as the phase of incorporating analysis using different qualitative methods of data analysis. In particular, the use of content analysis and grounded theory research in this study will also be explained in detail.

However, it is important to note that prior to commencing the official data analysis process, the researcher ensured that, as recommended by Doyle (2004), the three focus groups were the focused unit of analysis instead of any particular individual. Hence, the researcher ensured that the codes and categories were developed for each group as opposed to independent individuals, and comparisons were continually made across groups.

3.3.1 The coding process

No qualitative research software package was used to analyse the results of the research. Instead, the researcher made use of the Microsoft Office XP Professional package (9th Oct 2005),

Excel XP (9th Oct 2005), and developed spreadsheets to ensure that the objectives of each coding method were met. These were saved in the form of “workbooks” and files were saved according to their coding phase for ease of reference and access by the researcher. Tables and figures outlining codes, categories and examples of the data reflected on Microsoft Excel workbooks are available upon request and will be referred to in the chapter discussing the results and findings.

This particular process of data analysis was not only labour intensive but also time consuming. However, according to Henning (2004), this continuous exposure to the data afforded the researcher yet another opportunity to gain a clear and in-depth understanding of the data, ensuring she was competent in the development of a core category as well as the substantive theory.

3.3.2 Content analysis: defining the term “subjective experience”

In order to develop a substantive theory on “a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development”, using grounded theory, the researcher required a definition of “subjective experience”. Since she had reserved the definition of “subjective experience” to the focus group interviews, it was necessary to formulate a definition from the transcribed data in order to structure the development of the grounded theory. This definition served the basic framework, providing guidance in terms of the development of the substantive theory.

Thus, in order to formulate a definition in this way, the data collected during the first phase of the focus group interview, requesting participants to define “subjective experience” were analysed by means of content analysis. The main reason for this is that content analysis allows data to be analysed in terms of coding the specific set of information into precisely defined categories (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Supporting the use of content analysis as a second research design, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) explain that this form of qualitative analysis is often used in combination with other research designs. Mouton (2001) refers to content analysis as a secondary research tool. Hence, a formal definition of “subjective experience” was prepared, according to the transcribed data, to help ensure the development of a grounded theory in relation to the definition of “subjective experience”.

It was evident from the definition of “subjective experience” that this data formed a critical component in formulating a completed and relevant theory as proposed by the research because it served as an element in defining properties of particular subcategories, that is, the subcategory of leadership development. Information on the individuals’ perceptions of leadership and leadership development was provided and factors impacting on these perceptions highlighted. However, leadership development was still analysed as part of the grounded theory research because it was an important category which could be objectively analysed in terms of its properties and dimensions.

During content analysis, memos were completed in which the researcher conceptualised definitions, impacting factors as well as possible underlying information not present at face value in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The tone, as well as negative or positive connotations associated with the data analysis were captured and highlighted as influencing variables in both content analysis and the grounded theory analysis.

The remainder of the data were analysed on the basis of grounded theory research and moved from labelling phenomena, to open coding, axial coding, and finally, selective coding through which the substantive theory of a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback was developed (Glaser, 1992).

3.3.3 Grounded theory data analysis

Critical to the grounded theory process was the fact that, although a basic analytic framework of the definition of “subjective experience” had been formulated, the researcher did not allow this to influence the first phase of grounded theory. Instead allowed the data to flow inductively to what had been deduced (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

This followed the simple path from open coding where phenomenon were labelled and defined in terms of properties and dimensions, to axial coding, in search of specific relationships, and finally, the identification of core categories in selective coding, ultimately developing the substantive theory.

3.3.3.1 Open coding

After each focus group interview, the researcher coded/labelled identifiable themes or topics that were evident in the data. These were labelled phenomena. The result from this was a considerable number of phenomena which were then grouped, according to specific elements, into what is known as codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher did not code words, lines or paragraphs, but rather relevant themes and topics, in conjunction with formulated memos (Thorne et al., 2004).

Once the second focus group interview had been transcribed, using the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher identified similar codes as well as any new relevant codes that began to emerge in the data, continuing until all three focus groups had been coded. Using the technique of systematic comparison of two or more phenomena, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), smaller units of data emerged, facilitating the continuation of the research process. As recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this continued until saturation was reached and the researcher was confident that coding more transcripts would only produce a repetition of themes.

During this phase, the researcher also commenced making theoretical comparisons, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which entailed looking at some of the data objectively with their emergence in context and the way the data influenced identifiable themes and patterns. Thus, instead of identifying categories that were only relevant as core themes, contextual factors were considered. This assisted the researcher in examining the data in terms of specific properties because the focus was on how often a particular concept emerged and what it looked like in varying conditions versus the number of individuals who demonstrated the particular concept (Glaser, 1992). Therefore, as the researcher coded data, reviewing the transcriptions and memos, she commenced writing more comprehensive memos, continually comparing new codes with old, as suggested by Leedy & Ormrod (2001). Categories and relationships thus began to emerge from the data.

Each category was analysed in terms of its properties and dimensions which served as a means of facilitating the identification of relationships between phenomena that were appropriately

grouped under each category as subcategories. In an effort to ensure that increased numbers of properties were identified for each conceptual category, as suggested by Locke (2001), each category was fully described and theoretically dense.

The next step, as recommended by Locke (2001), was the preparation of a theoretical definition for each category. It was during this period that the number of units the researcher was working with was reduced and she faced the challenge of identifying the range of potential meanings contained in the words used by the participants and developed them more fully in terms of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.3.3.2 Axial coding

Once the categories had been formulated and defined in terms of subcategories, properties and dimensions, the researcher began searching for themes and patterns across categories and identifying both relationships and processes (Henning, 2004). These processes formed the basis of axial coding and it was during this stage that the researcher ensured an open mind to allow for the evolution of new information and prevent the bias that may have been conditioned on the basis prior research (Glaser, 1992).

To assist the researcher in identifying relationships between categories, the paradigm model was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although this model is not supported by Glaser (1992) owing to forcing data into a particular structure, it provided the researcher with a method in which data were analysed in a relevant format and added great value in terms of understanding the differences and similarities identified in the data.

The paradigm model integrated defined categories in a causal-consequence theoretical framework describing the context and conditions under which categories and the relationships between them occur. During this phase, the researcher worked with categories that had emerged as prevalent and congruent with factors identified in the content analysis and the definition of “subjective experience” (Locke, 2001). Hence, the headings for the different paradigm models used are congruent with the components identified in the definition that is, reaction, perception

and past experience. The key differentiator is that the components are more evolved and detailed in the paradigm model, taking their properties and dimensions into consideration.

Criteria for identifying suitable categories and relationships included the prevalence of certain topics across all three focus groups as well as the energy and enthusiasm participants demonstrated when discussing these categories/subcategories and their relationships (Morgan, 1997). Hence seven categories were analysed as basic phenomenon using the paradigm model. The remainder of the categories and subcategories were classified in terms of either context, causal conditions, properties, strategies, intervening conditions or consequences, as illustrated in the model below.

The figure below illustrates the process of the paradigm model.

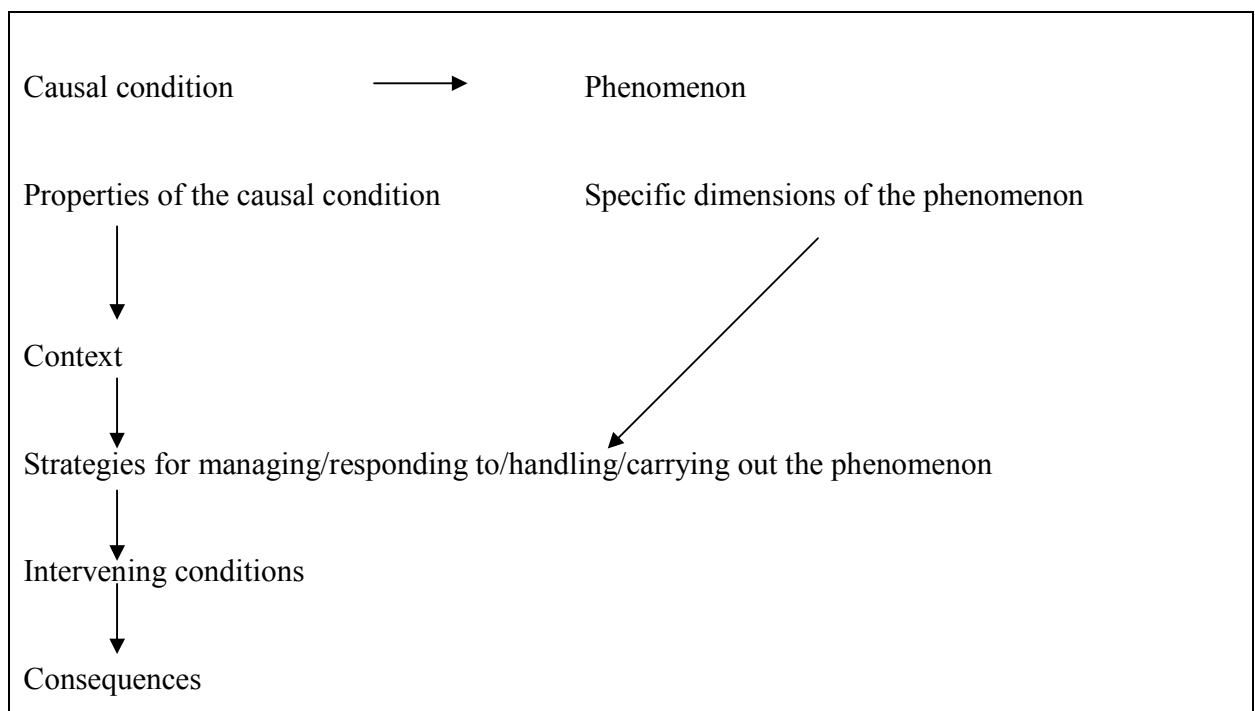


Figure 3.1 **The paradigm model** (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

However, in an attempt to stabilise and saturate each of the categories in the development of the working theory, the researcher examined comparative situations in order to determine how a category may be affected by different conditions (Locke, 2001).

At this stage, the researcher commenced the development of identifying process by conceptualising the way in which categories influenced and were influenced by certain conditions and how outcomes could be different, depending on the intervening variables impacting on the categories. The concept of process, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), enabled the researcher to purposefully note the movement, sequence and change of certain actions/interactions and the way they were modified or evolved in response to certain conditions.

The researcher then began identifying emerging conceptual linkages which served the purpose of linking two or more categories, explaining the what, why, where and how of a category and commencing the integration of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thereafter, she was able to compile a rough draft of a framework of the theoretical components based on the emergent conceptual linkages. The researcher realised that fewer modifications to the categories, subcategories, dimensions and properties as well as identified relationships were required (Locke, 2001). Questions suggested by Henning (2004) were used in an effort to understand the framework, and these included identifying the meaning of the relationships between the categories; understanding what categories were grouped together; and identifying whether anything in particular was missing. Literature and previous research were introduced to help saturate the axial codes developed and substantiate emerging conceptual links. These processes constituted the core of integrating the data, a key element of the axial coding process. It was at this point that the researcher identified that there was no requirement for theoretical sampling (Henning, 2004) and was comfortable confirming that the data gathering could be finalised and that theoretical saturation had been sufficiently achieved.

The researcher thus finished the axial coding and did not make use of the suggested conditional matrix (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Glaser's (1992) view the reasons for this included the following: the conditional matrix was another form of forcing data and did not truly allow the process of grounded theory to take place; and secondly, in line with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) recommendation the researcher used grounded theory as a research design for the first time in order to avoid the complicated requirements. There is also evidence that few grounded theories include this conditional matrix (Locke, 2001).

The researcher was now ready to proceed to the final coding phase and start writing the substantive theory.

3.3.3.3 Selective coding

As defined, the process of selective coding was similar to that of axial coding, although, at this stage, integration occurred at a higher abstract level of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The main aim of the researcher, in line with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) recommendation, entailed delimiting unnecessary categories and identifying the core categories in the research, that is, grouping core categories and subsidiary categories. This had already commenced during the phase of grouping emerging conceptual linkages under applicable categories and subcategories.

The researcher then followed prepared diagrammatic representations of categories and their relationships, facilitating the identification of those that did not fit into the theory that seemed to be developing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This phase, as highlighted by Locke (2001), ensured that the researcher reviewed each category in an effort to identify whether it could be subsumed under a conceptually broader category; and investigated whether it was possible to either combine an outlying category or determine whether a category should essentially be dropped. Although the researcher did not delimit any category on account of its contextual implications, she was able to identify those categories that had a minor influence on the theory.

Owing to the fact that theoretical sampling was considered unnecessary, the researcher ensured that the data were re-examined, with the categories formulated in mind, and confirming that all categories were appropriately captured in the information (Locke, 2001).

Conceptual linkages were again reviewed, and the researcher identified that, in correlation to the identified codes of the definition of "subjective experience", the data analysed in the grounded theory process could be aligned to the same core categories. This alignment, although inductively developed, was already being deductively confirmed.

The core categories were therefore measured against Leedy and Ormrod's (2001) criteria to ensure that they were interlinked, and that subcategories relating to them could not stand alone

with a reciprocal influencing relationship between them, being evident. To support this, the researcher ensured that the core category was the most densely developed and accounted for most of the behaviour observed (Locke, 2001). Hence, the formulation of the substantive theory emerged with ease and efficiency. This concluded the conceptualisation phase, serving as an overall summary of the interpretation.

3.3.3.4 Interpretation of the data: writing the theory

Although the researcher had conducted a literature review and had ensured the basis for a preliminary framework, she was cautious about attempting to “fit” data that would, as stated by Kearney (2001) result in minimal if any new evidence about a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. The researcher ensured the continuous use of meaningful questions, applied the paradigm model to the data and generated useful conceptualisations (Thorne et al., 2004). She also remained sceptical about the immediately apparent and continually identified information that challenged and reinforced earlier conceptualisations (Thorne et al., 2004).

Careful attention was focused on ensuring full exploitation of the data, as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2001). Many simple questions were asked of the data to open up the information being provided by the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The theory that developed is substantive. According to Locke (2001), this is a normal practice in most business and management studies today. A more formal theory could be developed in future research, which would ensure that the areas of inquiry operate at a higher level of generality. Hence, by virtue of its reliance on interpretation, this grounded theory study, resulting in an interpretative description does not provide “facts”, but rather what Thorne et al. (2004) termed so-called “constructive truths”. Hence, the interpretation stage of this research is one of value, and one may conclude that the development of a grounded theory, following the interpretative paradigm, significantly depends on the process of intellectual inquiry (Thorne et al., 2004).

3.3.4 Strategies to enhance the quality of the grounded theory process

It is clear that the analytic process was grounded in the data because, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it moved inductively towards conceptual linkages and descriptions instead of the other way around.

No attempt was made to develop a numerical reliability rating, because the researcher's goal was to achieve consensus and logical flow across categories, their dimensions and properties. To achieve this, as suggested by Thorne et al. (2004), the researcher had not only to consider prevalence of a category but also be attentive to conceptualising emerging patterns across categories and subcategories.

This helped to meet the requirements of credibility which, according to Emden and Sandelowski (1999), occur when complexities are made visible through the analytic process and are articulated with an openness or "criterion of uncertainty" that acknowledges a certain tentativeness about the final research outcomes. The researcher achieved this firstly by demonstrating that in axial coding, even forcing data into the paradigm model, does not confirm a specific process, but rather possibilities of changes due to varying conditions, strategies and contextual elements. Hence, even though the researcher was able to identify and find support for conceptual linkages within literature research and data extracts, she allowed the development of the theory to be conditional and open to change.

Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) emphasise the explication of the research process itself and the position of the researcher, which was made subjective throughout this chapter.

In order to confirm reliability and possible replication of the research study, as suggested by Holiday in (Henning, 2004), the researcher ensured that, the analysis process became more of a writing process, and kept a detailed record of every step of the process of analysis.

Reliability, in this instance, was ensured by the degree of consistency with which phenomena were assigned similar codes and the same category by the same researcher during the three different focus group interviews (Silverman, 2000).

As mentioned in the operational chapter, validity refers to the truth value of the data. Hence the researcher ensured that validity was achieved by following three practical principles proposed by Silverman (2000). The first of these involves the reporting of many exemplary instances of a conceptual linkages, throughout the data; definite and specific criteria for including certain instances to explain these linkages are provided; and the original form of the data is available; and in most cases, provided during the results presentation section that follows.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The research process that was followed in this study is well defined by Patterson and Uys (2005) as well as Baptiste (2001) as including a number of specific stages, namely transcription, open coding, axial coding, selective coding and theory writing.

The researcher commenced with a basic transcription of the focus group interviews, identifying the need to use content analysis as a method of defining “subjective experience”. She then initiated coding the data and identifying categories that were then analysed in terms of their properties and dimensions. At all stages, memos were formulated, and helped to identify the relationships between the categories and subcategories.

To allow for structure and improve the scientific reliability of the process, during axial coding the researcher used the paradigm model which helped facilitate the process of deriving conceptual linkages.

Using literature and data extracts to support emerging conceptual linkages, the researcher was able to define the core categories inductively during the selective coding process. These were interdependent of each other as well as of their subcategories, and according to Henning (2004), proving a central finding and the basis of the substantive theory.

Through the process of careful interpretation, the researcher was able to develop a substantive theory supported by previous literature research and confirmed by the current data collected in the study.

Clearly, the researcher was aware of certain limitations in the study which will be highlighted and recommendations for improvement made in the final chapter of the research study.

The purpose of this chapter was therefore to explain in detail the analytic processes inherent in conducting the research. According to Thorne et al. (2004), this is the essence of the utility and quality of the research method.

In the next chapter the results of the study will be discussed in an attempt to meet the operational aims of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter reports on the data obtained from the participants in the focus group interviews. Data will be presented according to the specific phases the researcher identified in the operational chapter. Research clarity and alignment will be evident in a clear discussion integrating both data analysis and literature support. Tables and figures outlining the processes and data analysis will be demonstrated in the text.

4.1 DEFINITION OF SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Content analysis was used to identify and define the main characteristics of subjective experience.

4.1.1 Identifying the main characteristics

Seven main characteristics were identified. These are stated in table 4.1 below, with supporting extracts from the focus group interviews.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of subjective experience

Characteristic	Data extract
Perceptions	“Based on how they see you and you see yourself, differently.”
Emotions	“It is emotional, there is a lot of emotion involved here.”
Present information	“Based on the information they have got”; “use the bit of knowledge you may have at your disposal.”
Past experience	“Based on one’s history of application.”
Context	“It is all about how you perceive the situation.”
Measurable	“There is no subjective norm to compare it against.”
Positive - Negative	“Whereas some people have been exposed to me like ups and downs, exposed to me in the bad times.”

After careful analysis of the main characteristics identified, the researcher formulated a definition of “subjective experience”.

4.1.2 Defining “subjective experience”

“Subjective experience is the perception and emotional and cognitive reaction of an individual towards a particular event/experience. These perceptions and responses are not measurable and are influenced by current contextual factors, past experience and the information available.”

For the purpose of structure and consistency, this definition formed the basis of the analytic framework through which the grounded theory study was initiated and the theory developed. Figure 4.1 represents the framework.

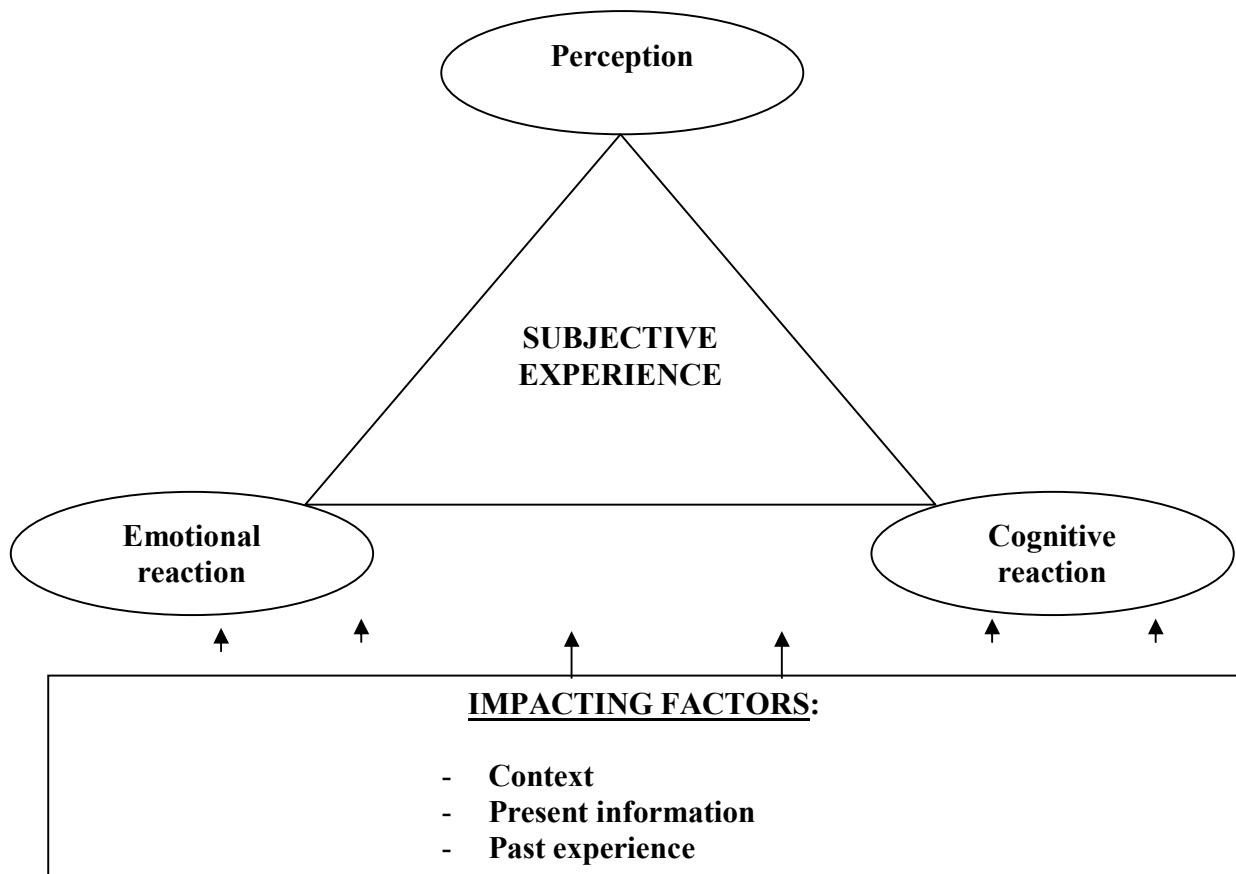


Figure 4.1 **The basic analytic framework: subjective experience**

“Subjective experience” was therefore an interaction of four basic elements namely: perceptions, emotional response, cognitive reaction and impacting factors, including context, information available and past experience.

During this stage, the researcher's memo highlighted the identification of the negative tone participants used when describing their subjective experience. This was particularly evident when the individuals stated that perspectives of others were "different" and related this to raters being exposed to the participants during a "bad time" or stating that it is common for others to focus on "negative things". Because this was immediately related to aspects of the 360-degree feedback process, the researcher inferred that the negative connotation in the definition of "subjective experience" was because it was related to the participant's own subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process. This would be confirmed in the continuation of the data analysis.

Once the definition of the "subjective experience" had been formulated and clarified, the researcher commenced the grounded theory analysis of the data to build a theory of the managers' "subjective experience" of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. The coding processes outlined in the next section (open, axial and selective coding) were responsible for building the grounded theory. Theory building commenced when open coding was initiated.

4.2 OPEN CODING

Open coding was divided into two distinct phases. The first identified and labelled phenomena, while the second formulated open codes, categories and subcategories. During the second phase, the researcher analysed both the categories and subcategories in terms of their properties and dimensions.

4.2.1 Phase 1: identifying and labelling phenomena: open codes

During this phase, a total of 84 labels were allocated to phenomena of general elements relating to a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback, identified in the focus group interviews. These labels are known as open codes, and are depicted in table 4.2. Some of the open codes appear in parenthesis, and are known as "in vivo" codes, indicating that they are the actual words used by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) compared to other labels which are formulated as appropriate encompassing labels by the researcher.

Table 4.2 List of open codes

Open Codes			
1	feedback impact	43	personal benefit
2	Lack of guidance	44	isolated use
3	impact on change	45	“trust”
4	“surprise”	46	Effort
5	denial	47	self-development
6	sensitivity	48	“gap closure”
7	rationalisation	49	skills development
8	level of interaction	50	leadership
9	conflicting emotion	51	competency identification
10	questioning	52	self-improvement
11	management perception	53	“self-honesty”
12	negative management perception	54	self-awareness
13	management impact	55	“reflection”
14	useful	56	Accuracy
15	"direction”	57	subordinate management
16	Job relatedness	58	rater specific
17	“worried”	59	competency clarification
18	“skewed results”	60	context specific
19	number of raters	61	question clarity
20	“forced ranking”	62	question applicability
21	evaluation tool	63	rater selection : perception
22	context	64	interaction specific
23	rater selection : process	65	selection bias
24	rater confrontation	66	development expectation
25	ranking process	67	Ownership
26	commitment	68	competency selection
27	environment impact	69	resource allocation
28	“manipulation”	70	role specific
29	resistance	71	Reliability
30	question interpretation	72	“contradiction”
31	enlightening	73	feedback provider
32	development focus	74	feedback provider expectation
33	“weakness”	75	feedback method
34	top management support	76	Consistency
35	reaction	77	credibility
36	feedback detail	78	Scientific
37	“anticipatory”	79	ranking
38	discrepant perceptions	80	tool applicability
39	access	81	Tool
40	Time allocation	82	process
41	process forward	83	Understanding
42	organisation support	84	results orientated

Since these open codes were generated from the transcribed data, examples of some of the open codes presented above are given below, supported by extracts from the data:

- Feedback impact – “feedback provider”; “feedback expectation”
- Guidance – “lack of guidance”; “no direction”; “no clarity”
- Denial – “no this can’t be”

- Rationalisation – “they don’t know me”
- Rater selection – “depends who I chose”; “choose my buddy”
- Ranking process – “rating is much better”; “ranking is like putting someone in a box”
- Question interpretation – “it is ambiguous”; “they understood it differently”
- Reaction – “wow”; “I want to ask them why”; “I want to fix it”
- Self-development – “it led to some form of personal development”
- Accuracy – “... inconsistency, therefore how accurate is it?”

4.2.2 Phase 2: developing categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions

In order to reduce the number of units with which the researcher was working, interrelated and similar codes were grouped under categories. Initially, 27 categories were identified. Table 4.3 below reflects the way in which open codes were grouped to form categories.

Table 4.3 Category identification

	Categories identified		Open codes
1	Cognitive reactions	>	denial; rationalisation, questioning
2	Emotional reactions	>	sensitivity, "surprise", conflicting emotion, "worried", "enlightening"
3	Action reactions	>	rater confrontation, resistance
4	Self -development	>	personal benefit, results orientation, commitment, effort, ownership, self honesty, self improvement, reflection, self-awareness
5	Subordinate development	>	subordinate management,
6	Rater bias	>	effort, commitment, rater selection process
7	Organisation influence	>	impact on change, environment impact
8	Organisation support	>	context, time allocation, access, resource allocation
9	Process	>	process forward,
10	Ranking method	>	"forced ranking", contradiction
11	Tool applicability	>	"evaluation tool",
12	Tool bias	>	question interpretation, question clarity, question applicability
13	Accuracy	>	accuracy, credibility, scientific, reliability, consistency
14	Management influence	>	management impact
15	Management support	>	Trust
16	Skewed results	>	context specific
17	Ambiguous results	>	reliability, contradiction
18	Role specific results	>	job relatedness
19	Rater specific results	>	rater specific, interaction, amount
20	Rater motivation	>	effort, time
21	Level of interaction	>	Consistency

22	Rater selection bias	>	number of raters, manipulation
23	Feedback process	>	feedback impact, feedback method
24	Feedback provider	>	feedback detail, direction, understanding, role
25	Top management feedback	>	negative perception, lack of guidance
26	Competency	>	competency identification, competency clarification, competency selection
27	Change	>	skills development, gap closure, development expectation, guidance, focus

From these 27 categories, the researcher identified relationships between them which resulted in only **six main categories** being identified. The remainder were classified as subcategories.

1. reaction
2. accuracy perception
3. usefulness of tool
4. contextual factors
5. past experience
6. present information

It was interesting to note that this classification and division of categories into relevant subcategories seemed to inductively begin to arrange the data into main characteristics of the framework defining “subjective experience”. Hence all extracts from the worksheets describing the categories and subcategories, in terms of their properties and dimensions, began to synthesise into the aforementioned framework of subjective experience.

Memos prepared by the researcher from the initiation of the data analysis informed the development of categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions and are incorporated into the researcher’s interpretation and conceptualisation of the subjective experience of managers, influencing the development of the substantive theory.

In this chapter, for the purpose of this study, the researcher only elaborated on those categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions that contribute significantly to the formation of the substantive theory developed as a final product of the research study. The reason for this was the excessive amount of information and data analysis tables available. However, all information not reflected has been integrated and incorporated into the results, and is available on request.

For the purpose of understanding subcategories and how they are developed in terms of properties and dimensions, tables explaining these subcategories in detail will be presented in the sections to follow.

4.2.2.1 Category: reaction

In the initial list of categories the researcher identified three subcategories which could be grouped under the category “reaction”. These included “emotional reaction”, “cognitive reaction” and “action reaction”.

Extracts from the data supporting these subcategories are indicated below:

- emotional reaction: “surprise”, “conflict”, “ambiguity”, “threat”, “enlightenment”
- cognitive reaction: “denial” and “rationalisation”
- action reaction: “verification” and “change”

These three subcategories had the same properties and were therefore grouped into the category “reaction”. Table 4.4 below identifies the properties for the category “reaction” as well as their Dimensions.

Table 4.4 Category: reaction

Category	Properties	Dimensions
Reaction	Intensity	High – low
	Duration	Long – short
	Type	Positive -neutral - negative
	Impact	Short term – medium term - long term

Intensity. Individuals’ reactions often differed in intensity. When substantial discrepancies between self and other rankings were evident, this caused great disruption or “shock”. The intensity was also influenced by the duration of the reaction prior to some change or further action taking place, that is as described denial precedes verification.

Duration, type and impact. The researcher found that the more negative the reaction the longer the denial or rationalisation would persist thus impacting on the short-term benefits of immediate gap closure and change. However, positive reactions also appeared to have a high intensity: “I

thought wow”, and resulted in long-term benefits such as immediate change and increased self-awareness leading to improved intrapersonal and interpersonal competence.

In further analysing this category, the researcher was able to identify some form of process that occurred. The emotional reaction was the individual’s emotional response towards a particular experience of receiving 360-degree feedback: “Wow”; “That was quite a shock”. This often preceded their cognitive reaction which was to deny or rationalise the feedback they had received: “No this can’t be” or “They don’t know me well enough”. Depending on the cognitive reaction, individuals would then act (action reaction) and either seek verification from their subordinates or peers on the results presented or attempt to immediately close the development gaps identified, or discrepancies in perceptions: “I must fix this” or “I am going to try and change the perception of my MD”.

To summarise: Linking back to the basic elements of “subjective experience”, emotional response was subcategorised as an “emotional reaction” and “cognitive reaction” too became a second subcategory coupled with the third subcategory “action reaction”. These were grouped into one category “reaction”. The theoretical definition of the category “reaction” was finalised as: “the response of individuals to the 360-degree feedback process which can be categorised in terms of being emotional, cognitive or action related.”

Seemingly, reaction was dependent on the individual’s perception of the accuracy of the 360-degree feedback process. The second category was then formulated.

4.2.2.2 Category: accuracy perception

This category was formulated in an effort to highlight all the subcategories that influenced/impacted on the accuracy perception of individuals in relation to receiving 360-degree feedback. This is the reason that only subcategory properties and dimensions as opposed to the actual properties and dimension of the category will be discussed. For the purpose of understanding subcategories and the way they are developed in terms of properties and dimensions, tables explaining these subcategories in detail will be presented. Once again, the emphasis is on those subcategories and properties that impact significantly on the final

substantive theory developed in terms of manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback through the grounded theory process.

An example of a subcategory for the category “accuracy perception” was that of “**rater bias**”. For purposes of this study, this was defined as the tendency of raters to rank individuals on specific competencies, depending on a number of influencing variables that do not result in an objective ranking. Table 4.5 below highlights the properties and dimensions of this subcategory and explains some of the influencing variables in further detail.

Table 4.5 Subcategory: rater bias

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Rater bias	Level of rater commitment	High - medium - low
	Relevance of rater job knowledge	High - some - none
	Type of rater motivation	Positive - negative - neutral - none
	Amount of time	Limited - unlimited - sufficient
	Level of effort	High - medium - low
	Level/relevance/type of interaction	Limited - unlimited - sufficient High - some - none Positive - negative

- *Relevance of rater job knowledge.* There are clear indications in the data that the raters did not have sufficient knowledge of the individual’s roles and responsibilities and would therefore not be able to rate him or her appropriately. One example in the data is: “Choosing people who understand who you are, know your background, is critical because you can get the bias introduced if you don’t do that properly.”
- *Level/relevance/type of interaction.* This property seemed to consistently have the most impact throughout the focus group interviews in determining the usefulness of the 360-degree feedback results. This was a particular concern as individuals were sensitive to the type of interactions they may have had with particular raters, often focusing on the possibility of manipulating results: “You can also get a fairly incestuous opinion if you only choose people who like you.” Evidence of negative feelings and uncertainty about the validity and reliability of the final outcome continued: “So often people don’t really know because they have dealt with you on one transaction ... I put more credibility on my direct reports

evaluation of me than I do on my boss because they have a lot more interaction with me”. Another example stated “Maybe it is not the people you don’t like but rather the people you haven’t done good work for”.

Another example of a subcategory that was developed, under the category “accuracy perception”, was in fact, an in vivo category, “**skewed results**”, as indicated in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Subcategory: skewed results

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Skewed results	Level of clarity	Unclear – vague – clear
	Role-specific relationship	High - med - low

- *Level of clarity.* Participants viewed the results of the 360-degree feedback process as ambiguous and vague. Hence clarity was often a concern: “The results are ambiguous if they don’t give you a definitive guide as to where you are failing or succeeding.”
- *Role specific relationship:* Participants viewed the results as extremely specific to the different roles fulfilled in the organisation. It was also agreed that these results were influenced by the particular context and situation. Hence participants were of the opinion that rankings and results would be different across raters, because the roles they fulfil in the organisation and the rater’s expectations of the ratee: “I think the process doesn’t cater for all, it is a one size fits all situation”; “I think that for different positions in the organisation different attributes are required.”

This, in turn, influenced the degree to which participants viewed the tool used in the 360-degree feedback process as applicable and appropriate. A third subcategory for the category “accuracy perception” was therefore developed and this was labelled “**tool applicability**”.

Table 4.7 Subcategory: tool applicability

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Tool applicability	Time allocation	Rushed – sufficient
	Suitability of ranking process	Suitable – unsuitable
	Item content	Applicable to job - applicable to organisation - applicable at different levels - not applicable
	Item clarity	Ambiguous interpretation - clear interpretation across raters

- *Time allocation.* Participants were of the view that the raters did not dedicate sufficient time to the ranking process because it was lengthy and time consuming. They also felt that they did not have enough time to complete the ranking process.
- *Suitability of the ranking process.* Concern about the value of the ranking process as opposed to the rating process was raised and participants indicated that the process did not provide clarity in terms of a development path. It was viewed as being a “picking exercise” and resulted in the “boxing” of individuals.
- *Item content and item clarity.* The type of competencies requiring ranking were not always suitable to particular raters nor for the ratee’s current role in the organisation. There was concern about how this could be applicable across raters. Items that were ambiguous and potentially interpreted differently across raters were also highlighted. Both of these properties resulted in individuals questioning the accuracy of the process. Extracts from the data supporting these properties include the following: “I think that you need to have separate ones for people who have direct reports and those who don’t”; “I think there are some things you are potentially good at but will not show through because of your role within the organisation”; “A lot of questions had two meanings”; “The questions were too wide”.

The final subcategory that will be discussed under the category “accuracy perception” is the “**feedback process**”. However, it should be noted that the “feedback provider”, an additional subcategory for the category “accuracy perception” also had a critical influence and will be discussed further in this chapter.

Table 4.8 Subcategory: feedback process

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Feedback process	Type of method	Methodical - interactive
	Level of detail	Sufficient detail - some detail - no detail
	Relevance of information	Relevant to current job - relevant to organisational requirements - irrelevant

Since the feedback process is the crux of the 360-degree feedback initiative as a tool in leadership development, the properties are essentially important in influencing participants' reactions and perceptions of accuracy.

- *Type of method.* Participants found that the method of feedback was “learned” and extremely systematic, terming it rather “methodical”. There was a clear need for a more interactive approach: “This is mechanical feedback.”
- *Level of detail.* There was a clear indication from the participants in the study (ratees) that there was insufficient detail and justification in relation to the rankings and results. This led to misinterpretation of certain elements as well as a lack of clarity in terms of what the implications of the feedback results were. “I expected that there would be a greater amount of analysis of the content of my particular outcome”; “I am not sure that I understood the scoring mechanism”; “I had the expectation that there was really going to be some sort of discussion into some of these areas with me and some help as to which ones I should or should not choose”. This property therefore had an impact on whether certain participants considered the information to be relevant.
- *Relevance of information.* Participants did not always find the information presented by the feedback provider during the feedback process be relevant to their particular jobs or the organisation. “The results are ambiguous and it does not give you a definitive guide as to where you are failing or succeeding”; “There was no understanding of what my role was in the company”; “Could not relate some of the strengths and development areas to my working environment”.

To summarise: the theoretical definition of the category “accuracy perception” was formulated as follows: “Accuracy perception is the degree to which the face validity of the accuracy of the 360-degree feedback process is perceived through the influence of certain factors including rater bias, skewed results, tool applicability and the feedback process.”

4.2.2.3 *Category: perception of usefulness of the tool*

It was deemed that in order for individuals to consider or perceive the 360-degree feedback process as being useful, it should provide value and possibly result in some form of change.

Hence, the first subcategory “change” was developed. It was interesting to note at this stage that what “**change**” actually constituted to participants was unclear and extremely subjective. One example from the data was: “ I can maybe focus on and see what change is” Change was also evident at two levels, the first being changing oneself (intrapersonal) and the second, changing the perception of others (interpersonal).

Table 4.9 Subcategory: change

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Change	Type	Intrapersonal - interpersonal
	Level	Personal - professional - personal & professional
	Timeline	Immediate - short term - long term
	Duration	Permanent – temporary

Prior to explaining the table above it is important to align change as an outcome of the first category discussed, namely “reaction”- that is an employee’s reaction, be it emotional, cognitive or action oriented will result in some form of change.

- *Type of change.* Change was classified into two types, namely intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal change was related to an increase in an individual’s self-awareness, resulting in improved self-efficacy and self-development. Interpersonal change, on the other hand, constituted improved relationships with management and improved skills in managing subordinates. Extracts supporting intrapersonal change in specific self development are presented as follows: “I think what I got out of it was the whole self-awareness thing ... the fact is it is actually like looking in the mirror”; “So you learned a lot

about yourself, about how people perceive you”. Further extracts supporting self-development related to the closure of certain development gaps: “Discrepancies will actually start to close; there is no way you can close out all the areas but identify two or three”; “It is good for identifying areas where you need to develop”; “I think it could be a useful tool in developing leaders”; “First of all identify the leadership competencies I need to do my job”.

Extracts supporting interpersonal change, that is, improved relationships and subordinate management include: “I think it could be a really useful way of good dialogue between management and their employees”; “It is a useful tool to manage the performance of subordinates”.

- *Level of change.* Change as a result of the 360-degree feedback process appears to impact individuals at different levels. That is, it may result in a personal change, and an awareness of a specific development gap may aid in improving relationships with a spouse. Alternatively, and what is most common to the 360-degree feedback process is professional change where participants identify development gaps in their work environment and ensure a focus to improve overall performance. Examples include: “Start to look at those areas you want to work on to make you a better leader”; “Realise that it is forming part of the way in which you interact with people and you should try and teach people as well”.
- *Timeline.* Change also occurs at different stages for individuals this is, after receiving the results, the participants described being “shocked”, “surprised” and “discussed it with my colleagues” or “confronted my subordinates” in an effort to “fix this” or “change their perceptions”. This can happen immediately or in the longer term, only after the process of confrontation and verification with subordinates and even management has occurred, “It will take some time”.
- *Duration.* Change may then be permanent or temporary. Since the reaction to change often seemed fuelled by impression management (“Well this is how people see me, I am going to have to do something to change it”), ratees seemed to have only a short-term focus to address apparent issues.

The perception of the usefulness of the 360-degree feedback process/tool is dependent on, among other subcategories, the type, level and impact of change.

The theoretical definition was formulated as follows: “Perception of usefulness of a tool refers to the degree to which the 360 degree process is perceived as being an applicable and value-adding process, determined ultimately by the change for both the individual and the organisation.”

As with any process, a number of factors influence the perception of the utility of a 360-degree feedback process, contextual factors being one of the factors that tends to have a huge impact.

4.2.2.4 Category: contextual factors

Two contextual factors were identified as subcategories, namely “**individual factors**” and “**organisation factors**”, as discussed in tables 4.10 and 4.11 below.

Table 4.10 Subcategory: individual factors

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Individual factors	Level of ownership	Total - medium - none
	Amount of commitment	Line manager - HR manager - none
	Level of trust	On-the-job - academic
		High - medium - low
	Time	Maximum - minimum

Table 4.11 Subcategory: organisational factors

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Organisational factors	Level of commitment	Total-some- none
	Clarity of alignment	Own- organisation- job- mutual
	Type of environment	Conducive – unconducive
	Type of recognition	Monetary - nonmonetary
	Amount of direction	Clear objectives - ambiguous objectives - no direction
	Type of support	Line manager - HR - none

For the purpose of this study, these tables will not be discussed further because the axial coding section provides extensive detail on the above two subcategories. However, the theoretical definition is as follows: “Context refers to the factors related to the individual’s resources,

commitment, support, and management support and efforts in creating an environment that is conducive to leadership development.”

Context is composed of the current information individuals have available which is linked to the next category, “present information”.

4.2.2.5 Category: present information

Present information as a category reflected all the specific information available to participants which influenced their subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process. The subcategories under “present information” were mainly related to information on leadership in the organisation as well as leadership development initiatives that were being applied and development incentives currently in place. Three subcategories were identified, namely **“leadership perception”, “leadership development initiatives”** and **“development incentives”**.

Careful analysis highlights the subcategories, properties and dimensions of these three categories in table 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14.

Table 4.12 Subcategory: leadership perception

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Leadership perception	Level of decision-making empowerment	High-medium-low
	Frequency of visibility	Always-often-seldom-never
	Extent of risk taking ability	High-medium-low
	Type of leader role	Buffer - defender - influencer
	Extent of fear	High-medium-low
	Extent of strategic thinking	High-medium-low
	Type of culture	Blame - ownership
		Historic - modern
Leadership style	Bureaucratic - autocratic - participative - consultative	

The topic of leadership impacted on the participants, level of cooperation, and their passion for and interest in the subject. This was evident in the tone of all the focus groups.

As indicated in the memos it is clear that the view of leadership in the organisation was extremely negative. The properties identified under “leadership perception” support this statement.

- *Level of decision-making empowerment.* There was clear evidence that leaders did not make decisions: “There is a lack of decisiveness”; “They are petrified to make a decision”; coupled with the lack of empowerment “I have not seen enough ... enable managers to cut through the red tape and make a decision, and take a decisive action”; “I am not capable of leading it enough because I am not empowered to”.
- *Extent of risk taking ability.* Current leaders are viewed as lacking in their ability to take risks. Inserts from the data are provided: “People are not encouraged to take risks”; “We don’t reward risk”. The consequences of taking risks are viewed as being negative: “He does it and he fails ... They fire the guy ... You are sending the message to the whole organisation ... Don’t take a risk”.
- *Extent of fear.* Inherent in both the above subcategories, is an evident source of “fear” as indicated by the participants’ statements: “We have a fear culture”; “We are too afraid of repercussions and what everyone else is going to think”. There was an evident concern under leadership regarding the visibility of the leaders in the organisation: “He is so protected ... there is no access”, “I have never met him”.

Table 4.13 Subcategory: leadership development initiatives

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Leadership development initiatives	Type of initiatives	Trial and error
	Amount of initiatives	None - some – numerous
	Focus of initiatives	Directing – moulding
	Style of initiatives	Rigid/ military - flexible/democratic
	Level of organisational commitment	High – low
	Level of leadership pool representativity	Representative - non representative

- *Type of initiatives.* These were viewed as being initiatives that were still in the development phase and were described by participants as being “trial and error”, indicating a lack of

certainty about whether they would in fact work in the longer term, thus impacting the credibility of initiatives currently in progress. (i.e. 360-degree feedback initiatives).

- *Focus and style of initiatives.* Individuals viewed the focus on leadership development in the organisation as being rigid and methodical. This was evident in the descriptions used in which individuals stated that leadership competencies were being “pumped” into the organisation, while attempting to develop individuals into the leadership “mould” for the organisation. These initiatives were thus viewed as a mass exercise, in which the unique needs of different organisations and individuals were not taken into account.
- *Level of organisational commitment.* Leadership development initiatives were viewed as being “sideline” initiatives with a lack of real commitment from top management being visible to support this. Time and resources for genuine focus on people development were not evident in the organisation, because it was considered to be a “soft issue”. A lack of time and resources to use the outcome or processes for the purpose of development were highlighted: “I must find the time”; “Try to do it as well as we can and in the time constraints”.
- *Level of leadership pool representativity.* The view that there were insufficient role models rendered leadership development initiatives as lacking the required impact and support: “They don’t have time to go and worry about your biggest career step”.

Table 4.14 Subcategory: development incentives

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Development incentives	Type of reward	Monetary- verbal- other
	Frequency of recognition	Always-often-seldom-never
	Amount of time allocated	Some - none - sufficient
	Resource allocation	Sufficient - insufficient

There was evidence from the focus groups that participants were concerned about the question of rewards and incentives. They felt that development initiatives should be incorporated into participants’ daily performance improvement, the main aim of any 360-degree feedback process.

- *Type of reward.* Participants highlighted that the type of rewards could vary from simple verbal recognition to monetary rewards such as increases and promotions. The female group in particular, was concerned about the incentives to “change” for the organisation for without these they did not see the value, and seemed to remain resistant to and hesitant about change: “Why should I?”.
- *Amount of time allocated/resource allocation.* Time and resource allocation were also considered important organisational incentives. It was suggested that organisations should encourage individuals to allocate sufficient time to development in an effort to improve performance. Examples included: “We don’t have time and space to actually manage and lead”; “Have to handle it after hours or wherever you find the time”; “It is called assistance in the form of resources”.

To summarise: “Present information” is theoretically defined as all the information individuals have available to them at a particular point in time which influences their perceptions and actions. Present information does not operate in isolation and perceptions are also influenced by individuals’ past experiences. The final category to be described for the purpose of this research is labelled “past experience”.

4.2.2.6 Category: past experience

Participants’ past experience with similar leadership development and/or performance improvement initiatives and the performance appraisal process (the only other feedback process they had been exposed to), in particular, were the two main subcategories developed in this category. They are explained in table 4.15 and 4.16 below.

Table 4.15 Subcategory: performance appraisal

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Performance appraisal	Applicability	Some – none
	Level of management commitment	Perceived high - perceived low – none
	Type of follow-through	Measured biannually - measured annually - paper exercise

Participants explained that performance appraisal was a system that could be used to evaluate individual's performance and demonstration of certain competencies.

- *Applicability.* There were divergent views about whether the appraisal was viewed as a useful tool in employee development: “It is really not a good system”; “If you actually do the thing properly you are developing people”; “Even if the process is not properly followed it can be a really good thing”.
- *Level of management commitment.* This process was not viewed as being appropriately used in the organisation, with a clear lack of commitment on the part of management. The question of why management would support the 360-degree feedback process when they did not support the performance management process was a concern: “They don’t take the whole performance appraisal thing seriously”; “If even that process is not followed ...”; “They don’t take the whole performance appraisal thing seriously, it is something that has to be done”.

Since the participants referred to other development initiatives they had previously been exposed to, the researcher identified “**development initiatives**” as a further subcategory of past experience.

Table 4.16 Subcategory: development initiatives

Subcategory	Properties	Dimensions
Development initiatives	Applicability at work	High - medium - low
	Relevance	Relevant - irrelevant (to current job and organisation requirements)
	Credibility	High - medium - low
	Usefulness	Follow-through - no follow-through

- *Applicability at work and relevance.* Participants commented on the fact that not all development initiatives they had been exposed to had demonstrated applicability to their particular work context and at times, these initiatives seemed to be rather irrelevant to their current job: “I think that there are a lot of people being brought into the leadership pool that might not necessarily know how to fulfil a leadership function”.

- *Credibility and follow-through*. Therefore, they questioned the credibility of previous initiatives and also emphasised the fact that follow-through was not evident, hence the lack of using development initiatives appropriately to build capacity in an organisation: “It is a sideline thing”; “So unless I made some effort from my side to get developed, nothing came from it”.

In conclusion, the definition for past experience includes previous experiences relating to development initiatives implemented in the organisation which influence individuals’ current perceptions of other development initiatives.

Open coding therefore highlighted six main categories which could be directly linked to the elements of the basic analytic framework for “subjective experience”. The elements of “emotional response” and “cognitive reaction” were grouped under the category, “**reaction**” with an additional subcategory, “action reaction”.

The categories “**accuracy perception**” and “**perception of the usefulness of the tool**” both related to specific subcategories influencing and impacting on the categories. The utility of the tool was in fact dependent on the outcome of the 360-degree feedback process and the way in which it was perceived. Hence the researcher was able to conclude that “accuracy perception” and “perception of usefulness of the tool” correlated directly with the element “**perceptions**” in the basic analytic framework.

All three subfactors in the basic analytic framework relating to “**impacting factors**” were identified and grouped accordingly into relevant categories and subcategories as follows: “**context**” (organisation and individual factors); “**present information**” (perception of leadership, leadership development initiatives and development incentives); and finally, “**past experience**” (performance appraisal and previous development incentives).

With a structured foundation of saturated open codes, the researcher focused on the next level of grounded theory analysis and initiated axial coding.

4.3 AXIAL CODING

Since only six categories constituted the “phenomenon” of the axial coding phase, stemming mainly from relevance of data and correlation with the definition of “subjective experience”, the researcher was able to clarify movement and process in each situation and this provided an appropriate foundation for the emergent conceptual linkages.

Owing to the number of axial coding sheets developed, for the purpose of this research study, the researcher presented only three relevant examples. Further examples are available on request. All the conceptual linkages described in this section were derived from the axial coding process.

The axial coding process will be illustrated in this section for each category by providing at least one example for each category developed. However, since the emergent conceptual linkages identified are based on these codes, they will not be described or explained in further detail at this stage.

As stated in the operational chapter, using the paradigm model in axial coding, the category the researcher refers to in each axial coding process is reflected under the label “phenomenon”. For ease of reference, the researcher will commence with the category “reaction”.

4.3.1 Category: reaction

Under this category, the most impactful causal condition on manager’s reactions was related to the feedback they received. This is elaborated on within table 4.17 with an indepth description which follows.

Table 4.17 Axial coding: reaction

Axial Coding	
<p>Causal condition Feedback received</p> <p>Properties of the feedback received</p> <p>Feedback provider Congruence between raters (i.e. blindspots and strengths) Results (ambiguity, role specific/ rater specific)</p> <p>Management ratings/ perceptions</p>	<p>Phenomenon Reaction</p> <p>Specific Dimensions of the phenomenon</p> <p>Extent (positive - negative - indifferent)</p> <p>Duration (long term - short term)</p> <p>Leadership development will be viewed as being congruent with self-development for the purpose of this dissertation and the research.</p>
<p>Context</p> <p>When the feedback provider is not an employee of the organisation, and there is a lack of congruence between rankings from different raters, the results are perceived as being ambiguous and management rankings are questioned. The reaction will extend into the longer term as an influencing factor on potential consequences.</p> <p>Strategies for management of reaction</p> <p>Rationalisation Denial Action</p> <p>Intervening conditions</p> <p>Self-awareness Openness to new information Honesty</p>	<p>When the feedback provider is an employee of the organisation, understands the organisational context and a little about the job requirements, the congruence between rankings is appropriately explained, even if it is discrepant and management rankings are valued. This will have a longer-term positive impact and will potentially lead to more positive outcomes.</p> <p>Memo:</p> <p>Even when an individual rationalises, it still results in self reflection.</p> <p>If the reaction is negative it will result in: Denial Rationalisation action - seek verification</p> <p>If the reaction is positive it will result in: Rationalisation action - seek verification</p> <p>action - seek change to reduce the perceptions</p>

Consequences	If the reaction is neutral: Rationalisation - no reaction because they do not really know me
Self-development	
No development	

In essence the paradigm model, elaborated on in the worksheet template above serves the purpose of indicating the following:

Although feedback received is a subcategory of “accuracy perception”, it is a causal factor impacting on or resulting in a reaction. The feedback received comprises a number of properties which include the following: who the feedback provider is, the level of congruence among the rankings received and the level of ambiguity present in the results and manager ratings. These very properties differ across individuals and are specific to a situation or context. Hence a reaction may be either positive, neutral or negative. Individuals attempt to manage their reactions either by rationalising, denying (cognitive reaction) or attempting to verify (action reaction) the results. However, the extent to which an individual is open to new experiences and the level of self-awareness he or she may have at the time will influence their reaction. The consequence of this will be some form of self development in line with an increase in self-awareness. Alternatively, no development may occur. This change in development relates to the subcategory “perception of usefulness of the tool”, in specifically explaining the consequence being related to self-development. Reference has also been made to the subcategories of “reaction” (cognitive and action reactions), with the properties being identified as strategies to manage reactions including rationalisation and denial. The subcategory of “accuracy perception” (rater bias, skewed results) are also included as the properties of the feedback received, influencing the specific reaction, strategies to manage and the consequences. A clear indication that every category and subcategory are influenced or influence each other in a number of different contexts is evident.

A few other causal conditions were identified as impacting on reaction through axial coding. These included the following:

- results
- feedback process

- management rankings (with “trust” identified as one of the intervening variables); management rankings refer to a particular “rater ranking” which proved to have a considerable impact on this process
- rater credibility (with “rater selection” as an intervening variable)

4.3.2 Category: accuracy perception

A second example of the use of a paradigm model for the category “accuracy perception” is detailed in table 4.18, focusing on one of the most influential causal condition, the subcategory “rater bias”.

Table 4.18 Axial coding: accuracy perception

Causal condition	Phenomenon
Rater bias	Accuracy perception
Properties of raters	Specific dimensions of the phenomenon
Motivation	Extent (positive - negative - indifferent)
Commitment	Duration (long-term – short-term)
Interaction	Impact
Knowledge of job	
Context	
The rater has a limited amount of interaction with the ratee and hence a limited knowledge of the job. Thus the commitment of the rater to the process is low and the result of a bad experience. The rater may be motivated to obtain “revenge” on the ratee and hence provide a biased ranking.	
Strategies for managing the perception of accuracy	
Rationalisation	
Confrontation	
Verification	

Memo: Rater selection and rater credibility include the role of raters' knowledge, interaction and their rationale for performing a ranking exercise.

Intervening conditions
Rater selection
Rater credibility
Consequences
Self-development
No development

The rationale of raters, which refers to the reason for the rankings they provide as well as their level of commitment to the process are significant properties of rater bias. In addition, raters offer rankings on the basis of the amount of interaction they have had with a particular ratee, or alternatively, the amount of knowledge they have of the particular ratee or job.

Ratees therefore attempt to manage the rater bias by verifying inconsistent rankings and confronting their raters. Alternatively, they rationalise the results by referring to the level of interaction they have had with particular raters. Intervening conditions include the way individuals have selected their raters as well as the degree to which they feel that the raters are credible. If raters have been selected objectively and are viewed as being credible, the results will be viewed positively and will be accepted by individuals. Again, the consequence of this will influence the overall outcome of the process and impact on an individual's level of self development in particular.

Other causal conditions influencing accuracy perception included the following:

- consistency of results
- tool applicability characteristics
- feedback process

4.3.3 Category: perception of usefulness of the tool

Throughout the research study, ‘subordinate management’ most often had the main causal impact on how manager’s would describe and evaluate the usefulness of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. This is clarified in the table below.

Table 4.19 Axial coding: usefulness

<p>Causal condition Subordinate management Properties of subordinate management Improved relationship Alignment of development with organisation objectives Improved communication</p> <p>Context There is a clear alignment of objectives between the individual and organisation resulting in improved relationships and communication.</p>	<p>Phenomenon Usefulness</p> <p>Specific dimensions of the phenomenon</p> <p>Appropriateness (personal - professional) Impact (long term - short term)</p>
<p>Strategies for carrying out subordinate development</p> <p>Align results with performance objectives Formulate appropriate development plan</p>	<p>Memo: All individuals are performance measured on the six leadership competencies. It is a culture that is to be entrenched in the organisation. Senior management are using it as a method to manage their subordinates. However, perhaps it is an indication that these very managers are projecting onto others - trying techniques they would want their manager to follow.</p> <p>There is a little confusion about why everyone in the organisation is performance managed on leadership competencies. It that organisations want every individual to be a leader and what is the definition of leadership?</p> <p>It is also important to try to understand what the consensus is regarding leadership development in organisations.</p>
<p>Intervening conditions Subordinate accuracy perception Lead by example Subordinate perception of usefulness</p>	

Consequences

Development of subordinate in line with leadership competencies required by the organisation

4.3.4 Category : Context

The category “context” identified two subcategories including “individual factors” and “organisation factors”. However, for the purpose of this research study, these subcategories were applicable only as causal conditions and not “phenomena”. They fulfilled the critical role of impacting on the degree of “change” that would occur, as reflected in table 4.20.

Table 4.20 Axial coding: individual factors

Causal condition	Phenomenon
Individual factors	Change impact
Properties of participant factors	Specific dimensions of the phenomenon
Amount of focus	Amount (high - medium-low)
Commitment	Duration (short term - long term)
Time afforded	Type (personal - professional - social)
Context	
In the context where individuals showed that they were committed to the process of development and focused on development gaps, sufficient time was allocated to using the information from the 360-degree feedback process appropriately. This facilitated the process of aligning themselves with the organisation’s objectives as well as their own objectives.	
Strategies for implementing change	
Align self with organisation	
Open-mindedness	
Seek to reduce gaps	
Intervening conditions	
Development plan formulated	
Support from top management	
Feedback provider proficiency	

<p>Consequences</p> <p>Closure of development gaps</p> <p>Leadership development initiative success</p>
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4.3.5 Category: present information

The basic elements of the 360-degree feedback process carried the biggest weighting when it came to the phenomenon of present information, highlighted in table 4.21.

Table 4.21 Axial coding: present information

<p>Causal condition</p> <p>360-degree feedback process</p>	<p>Phenomenon</p> <p>Present information</p>
<p>Properties of 360-degree feedback process</p> <p>Clarity</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Relevance</p>	<p>Specific dimensions of the phenomenon</p> <p>Amount (high-medium-low)</p> <p>Relevance (high-medium-low)</p> <p>Accuracy (high-medium-low)</p>
<p>Context</p> <p>There is a lack of clarity in terms of understanding the 360-degree feedback process in the organisation, with particular reference to the relevance of the process.</p>	
<p>Strategies for managing present information</p> <p>Verification</p> <p>Self-reflection</p> <p>Feedback provider assistance</p> <p>HR assistance</p>	<p>Memo:</p> <p>It seems rather difficult at this stage to find strategies or actions that will help to ensure that present information is managed/responded to accordingly.</p> <p>Verification seems relevant because in order to respond to the results, which forms part of the present information, individuals seemed to generally seek clarification.</p> <p>Self-reflection on managing the current information and possibly figuring out for themselves how to align and ensure relevant information is taken into account. This also seems relevant to this particular aspect.</p>

<p>Intervening conditions</p> <p>Line management communication Feedback provider communication</p> <p>Process debriefing Development approach</p> <p>Monitoring method</p> <p>Consequences</p> <p>Clear understanding Commitment Aligned development plan Appropriate selection of competencies for development</p>	<p>Line management needs to be consistent and able to confront individuals with even the negative feedback yet offer honest and constructive feedback and action plans.</p> <p>Feedback provider needs to explain the process again and how this is interrelated to the individual job, organisation, etc.</p> <p>It is important for individuals to understand that their experience is possibly quite normal; that the results they obtained were not "strange". They require some form of assurance and this emerged increasingly in this exercise.</p> <p>It is critical for participants to have some form of assurance that the process they are currently involved with is being appropriately monitored. If this is not the case, they fail to see the value of the entire exercise.</p>
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4.3.6 Category: past experience

Manager's perception of leadership formed the core causal condition in terms of their past experience and the contribution to developing their subjective experience.

Table 4.22 Axial coding : past experience

<p>Causal condition</p> <p>Leadership perception</p>	<p>Phenomenon</p> <p>Past experience</p>
<p>Properties of leadership perception</p> <p>Decision making</p> <p>Risk taking</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Fear</p> <p>Strategic thinking</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Lead by example</p>	<p>Specific dimensions of the phenomenon</p> <p>Type (positive - negative - indifferent)</p> <p>Impact (long-term – short-term)</p> <p>Relevance (high-medium-low)</p>
<p>Context</p> <p>Here past experience of leadership has created a perception of an inability to make decisions, take risks or appropriately empower individuals. There is a fear culture among individuals and managers. Leaders are not viewed as leading by example and lack strategic thinking.</p>	

Strategies for responding to past experience in terms of leadership perceptions Comparison Rationalisation	
Intervening conditions	
Relationship with direct line manager Leadership pool in the organisation Current state of the organisation	<p style="color: red;">Memo: The relationship with direct line manager had a direct impact on the individual views of leadership in the organisation and the leadership pool. Their experience in terms of decision making, empowerment, etc, were much influenced by this.</p> <p style="color: red;">Often referred to the organisation being in a "leadership crisis" at this stage/time.</p>
Consequences Self development No development	

Evidently what the researcher realised through this process is that categories could vary in terms of the role (i.e. causal/consequence/intervening) they would fulfil, depending on the context of particular situations. Therefore, through the development and interpretation of axial codes using the paradigm model, the researcher began to identify a number of conceptual linkages. This is not only because it is an inherent aspect of qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), but also because it is the next logical step in grounded theory analysis (Locke, 2001), and according to Glaser (1992), the ultimate impact that informs the theory.

Conceptual linkages are derived for subcategories reflected under what the researcher identified both in axial coding and in correlation with the definition of subjective experience.

4.4 IDENTIFYING AND DESCRIBING EMERGING CONCEPTUAL LINKAGES

A number of conceptual linkages emerged during this stage of data analysis have been formulated for each of the six main categories, these are described below. Where applicable, for clarity of understanding, the researcher has highlighted the relevant subcategories to which the conceptual linkages make reference. All conceptual linkages appear in bold with a brief description following each one.

4.4.1 Category: reaction

The process of 360-degree feedback results in an emotional reaction that develops into a cognitive reaction and leads to an action reaction. These reactions are not stagnant and may change over time.

A clear sequence of events occur when individuals receive 360-degree feedback results. This first is an emotional reaction, which is an emotional response such as “Wow”, “I was in shock”; “What a surprise”. What causes this emotional reaction is an awareness of the discrepancies between an individual’s own perceptions and those of others. Research by Funderberg and Levy (1997) emphasise the importance of emotional responses by stating that it has a substantial impact on the effectiveness of the system.

After an emotional reaction, most respondents deny the feedback. This is a cognitive reaction serving as a defence mechanism. This is supported by research which indicates that when receiving complex feedback, the recipients are likely to distort it (denial) by focusing only on results similar to their self-assessment and ignoring those that are not (Meyer & Odendaal, 1999). Denial is generally followed by rationalisation and participants begin stating that because of the level of interaction, exposure or job roles, the raters did not rank them accordingly. Alimo- Metcalfe (1998) advance a possible reason for this is as the tendency of individuals to attribute the negative outcomes of their behaviour to factors outside themselves and positive outcomes to personal attributes.

Following a cognitive reaction, participants would request justification and clarification on the rankings, and would follow an action reaction, including verifying results with raters (in particular subordinates and colleagues) or identifying development gaps and initiatives to close these gaps. According to research by Cooper and Schmitt (1995), this adjustment of behaviour by individuals to align the perceptions of their behaviour with a particular standard is a common reaction to self-awareness. It is known as self-regulation. Research by Day (2000) also states that the managers who discussed feedback with their subordinates showed greater change and improvement than those who did not.

After the action reaction, cognitive reaction could once again be influenced and participants demonstrated either accepting the results or continued to deny them.

Negative ratings are not seen as accurate and useful and may engender negative reactions. This is because individuals often see the process as evaluative rather than developmental, even when promised confidentiality (Brett & Atwater, 2001). This was clear throughout the focus group interviews. Research by Brett and Atwater (2001) provides evidence that negative reactions, that were evident in the current research study, were usually only the case when feedback concerned personal characteristics rather than task behaviours. There was insufficient evidence in the current research study to support this statement, but most of the competencies referred to were task-oriented behaviour.

A further identifiable element relating to the category reaction was that most managers in the research study tended to overestimate their competencies. According to Jansen and Vloeberghs (1999), this is a common occurrence among individuals.

Table 4.23 below highlights general reactions to the feedback process experienced by ratees who overestimate, underestimate or are congruent with rater rankings and the way these impact on the performance improvement process of managers.

Table 4.23 Overestimators, underestimators and in-agreement ratings: the reaction and impact on performance (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; McCarthy & Garavan, 2001; Moshavi et al., 2003)

Category	Description	Reaction to feedback	Performance improvement
Overestimators	Rate self higher than other ratings. Misdiagnose strengths and weaknesses. Ignorant of how others perceive them.	-rationalise negative feedback and accept positive feedback as more accurate -ignore criticism and discount failure	-poorer performance in the longer term -if results are accepted, may lead to enhanced performance
Underestimators	Rate self lower than other ratings. Misdiagnose strengths and weaknesses. Modest and agreeable.	-capable of integrating evaluations of others into own self perception.	-performance improvement in the longer term is evident because of the amount of effort by the individual
In-agreement	Congruence with self and other ratings; high need for achievement and internal locus of control	- able to observe and act on the feedback provided by others - better able to alter their behaviour	- positive individual and organisational outcomes

From the above, it is evident that because the reactions were generally rationalisation and denial, the senior managers in the sample were overestimators. Hence, as stated by Day (2000), this may have an impact, in the form of defence mechanisms, on the outcomes of the leadership intervention. Clearly, what individuals should seek to achieve is “in-agreement” ratings, indicating that their perception of performance is the same as the perception of their subordinate, manager, peer, and/ or customer perception of their performance (Moshavi et al., 2003).

4.4.2 Category: accuracy perception

4.4.2.1 Subcategory: rater bias

Rater motivation, level of commitment and interaction as well as knowledge of the job, impacts on the perception of the accuracy of the 360-degree feedback results.

For the purpose of this subcategory, the researcher allocated data and research relating to management as a separate conceptual linkage because the impact this rater level has on the process. Hence the explanation below has a specific relation to peers, subordinates and customers, while a detailed analysis of management as a rater is provided later.

- *Rater motivation.* Participants were concerned that the justification for specific rankings was questionable and dependent on the subjective nature of the relationship: “If they don’t like you ...”. Research referring to rater affect is applicable in this instance as Antonini and Park (2001) state that it influences the way in which the rater interprets information because he or she attributes qualities to ratees that are consistent with his or her affect towards the ratee.
- *Level of commitment and interest.* The level of commitment and effort from raters did not seem to meet the participants’ expectations and was merely seen as an exercise participants took part in as opposed to an initiative in which they took an interest. This was attributed to factors such as time constraints or interest level: “... if they took the extra effort”. According to Thach (2002), it is essential for organisations to link the 360-degree feedback process to a specific business need and support the process by ensuring for the appropriate resources and time allocation are available for employees.

- Interaction.* Participants were of the opinion that rankings were influenced by the amount and type of interaction raters had with the participants being ranked: “People I chose don’t know me in other roles except the corporate, strategic role I play”; “Choosing people who understand who you are, know your background is critical because you can get the bias introduced if you don’t do that properly”; “Asking someone like that to rate you on behavioural and emotional type issues ... he doesn’t know me from a bar of soap”; “I put more credibility on my direct reports evaluation of me than on my boss ... he doesn’t know me well enough”; “They may have interacted with me on one occasion only”. In support of the above results, McCauley and Moxley (1996) emphasise that the inconsistencies in the way managers are rated is a direct result of the level of exposure, behaviour of the manager in different situations and the expectations of peers, supervisors and subordinates. The organisational level of the manager being ranked was also found to be a factor that affects what constitutes critical leadership behaviours at that level (Hooijberg & Choi, 2000). According to Rodrigues (1993), the nature of the leadership situation, further assists in determining the relative importance of competencies. Consequently, Tsui, Ashfort, St. Claire and Xin (1995) emphasise the importance of managers knowing what various rater levels consider critical leadership behaviours. In this way, discrepant ratings, producing a different pattern of correlations, will result in an accurate picture of leader development needs and provide an opportunity for delivery of different roles required at different relational levels (Salam et al., 1997).
- Job knowledge.* Ratees were of the opinion that not all raters had sufficient knowledge of their job responsibilities or of what was required, thus influencing the rankings. “I am hired to be risk averse ... but then they say that a development area is learning to be less risk averse that is in contradiction”. Research by Van der Heijden and Nijhof (2004) states that raters who possess greater familiarity with the job and the rate often provide far more accurate ratings. This particular element, is also correlated with rater competence/source credibility as perceived by the ratee. Fecteau et al. (1998) concur by stating that rater competence does influence the perceptions of the accuracy of the rating system.

The perceived extent of knowledge managers have of an individual, coupled with consistency in terms of results, and face-to-face feedback, influence an individual's perception of the accuracy of the 360-degree feedback results and/or process.

- *Extent of knowledge (superficial acquaintance).* There was clear support for this conceptual linkage because individuals indicated that management did not interact with them on a sufficiently regular basis. This rendered their rankings questionable because of an insufficient knowledge of the individual: “This is his viewpoint but in my opinion it doesn’t count a lot because he doesn’t know me well enough”. This again underscores the perception that rankings are not completely accurate: “I don’t know if it is completely reflective of your true skills”.
- *Consistency (different perceptions of the job/ communication).* A lack of consistency in terms of results presented and feedback from managers were also common. When ratees were comfortable sharing their feedback with management (one of the rater sources), upon confrontation, management discredited the process by stating they did not intend it to be interpreted in the manner it had been or that it was untrue. “I thought it was actually a joke, because one thing that came out is that my manager thinks I am not intelligent ... he said, ‘what, how is that possible?’”; “He says no, he wasn’t quite sure why he rated me so low in particular cases; then he says, ‘oh, it must be because they were forcing you into three boxes’”. Managers generally prefer to avoid confrontation, which could be a possible factor influencing this reaction from management.
- *Face-to-face feedback (lack of communication between both parties).* The research study provides evidence of the requirement by ratees that management have a one-on-one discussion with them about their development needs. However, management again tend to avoid this confrontational situation.

Highlighted in brackets, the above data extracts are supported by the theory that the differences between self and supervisor ratings are often attributed to the following three factors as outlined by Van der Heijden and Nijhof (2004):

- 1) different perceptions of the job, resulting in different assessment criteria as well as different cognitive and emotional processes

- 2) superficial acquaintance
- 3) lack of communication between both parties

4.4.2.2 Subcategory: feedback process

The method, detail and consistency of the feedback process, coupled with the feedback provider's level and extent of knowledge, influence the participant's perception of the accuracy of the 360-degree feedback results.

- *Method of feedback.* Participants viewed the feedback as a routine, methodical and rigid process that the feedback providers had learned: “This is mechanical feedback”; “You could see he had learned the method”; “Very systematic manner of providing feedback”.
- *Amount of feedback detail.* It was evident that participants had high expectations in terms of the detail they expected to receive during the feedback process. However these expectations did not however appear to have been met. An example from the data include: “I expected that there would be a greater amount of content on my particular outcome by the person who did the feedback with me”.
- *Degree of consistency.* The feedback provider did not always provide verbal feedback corresponding to the report highlighting the written results. This contradiction resulted once again in participants questioning the accuracy of the process: “How does this result come out because the feedback was in the opposite direction the result was”.
- *Level and extent of knowledge.* Participants showed particular concern about the fact that the feedback provider did not have sufficient knowledge to be able to appropriately provide accurate feedback and guidance: “No understanding of my role in the company ... I think it was quite dangerous to give feedback in a situation like that”; “She did not know the environment under which I work and she could not relate some of the strengths and weaknesses or competencies to my work environment”.

To summarise: When feedback is methodically lacking in detail, consistency and integration, and the feedback provider is from outside of the organisation, with insufficient knowledge of the organisation and individual, the participant's reaction to 360-degree feedback is negative.

However, when the feedback provider is interactive, using a flexible process with sufficient guidance for the participant to take ownership, a far more positive reaction is elicited: "The feedback session itself was brilliant ... he gave me two full hours, it was sincere ... he was completely engaged, it was sort of a discussion". It was this same participant who demonstrated clarity in terms of the objectives for self-development and had a positive view of the 360-degree process.

These extracts from the data are supported by research evidence that the feedback received during a 360-degree process is not only powerful but also subject to gross misinterpretation and misunderstanding (Mumford & Gold, 2004). This is because the quality, nature and source of feedback received are viewed by Morgan et al. (2005) as the determining factors of the process value. Receiving feedback can also be regarded as a threatening activity for most people and they may deem it not to be worth the risk. Hence, according to McCauley and Van Velsor (2004), formal feedback may help to reduce the interpersonal threat because the neutral character of the tool serves as an objective medium.

Furthermore, Wimer (2002) emphasises the importance of the feedback provider being carefully selected to represent those who know the ratee best, thus ensuring that the feedback is constructive and developmental.

4.4.2.3 Subcategory : skewed results

The consistency and clarity of the results and the role-specific competency requirements influence the participant's perception of the accuracy of the 360-degree process.

- *Degree of consistency.* There was a lack of consistency in terms of verbal feedback and the written report as well as between different rankings provided by different raters: "Because sometimes things will be rated most likely, but if you look at the consistency, the consistency at the bottom said something like 50 percent....and I said but how can it be 50

percent if everyone agrees that we are up there”. Participants highlighted the lack of consistency in terms of correlations between different ratings from different sources. Interestingly, Jansen and Vloeberghs (1999) state that even when intercorrelations are high, this may still result in inconsistencies in the way managers are rated. The degree of consistency in terms of level of interrater agreement helps participants to understand the feedback, and they are therefore willing to accept this feedback (Meyer & Odendaal, 1999).

- *Level of clarity.* When feedback results were presented, the feedback provider was often unable to appropriately explain any contradictions or ambiguities encountered by the participants. This inconsistency and lack of clarity once again resulted in participants challenging the usefulness and accuracy of the 360-degree feedback process: “How does this result come about because the feedback was in the opposite direction the result was”.
- *Role-specific relationship competencies.* Participants were concerned that competencies referred to in the feedback failed to consider their current role in the organisation. Examples from the data include: “We were hired to be risk averse and one of my biggest negatives is that I am risk averse ... there is a bit of contradiction here”; “I think that the process doesn’t cater for different situations, it is a one size fits all”; “I think for different positions in the organisation different attributes are required”; “I also think there are some things you are potentially very good at but this will not show through because of your role in the organisation”.

Recent studies by Suutari (2002) have indicated the importance of ensuring that the context of a particular job be considered because it often related to higher performance in terms of specific behaviours. Application of different weightings by different raters was a recommendation from a study by Pernick (2001) in an effort to ensure fair rankings. However, although Rodrigues (1993) and Hayes et al. (2000) concur that the competencies required for effective performance may not be the same in all situations, there is evidence that supports the fact that foundational competencies may be similar across organisations and managerial levels (Pernick, 2001). A further consideration is that in order for 360-degree appraisals to have the required impact, these appraisals should be focused on competencies required in the future and not limited, as

participants in this research study indicate, only to their current roles in the organisation (Kur & Bunning, 2002).

4.4.2.4 Subcategory: reaction

Participants' reaction to the results of the 360-degree feedback process influences their perception of the accuracy of 360-degree feedback results.

There were clear gender differences in terms of reactions to the 360-degree feedback received.

The male group were more concerned with challenging rankings from their subordinates and were keen on doing this through confrontation with subordinates. According to Valle and Bozeman (2002), a potential reason for this could be that subordinate ratings are often lower than self-ratings and supervisor ratings because of higher bias, anonymity, lack of perceived similarity with the supervisor and the perceived supervisory support. Further supporting research indicates that a manager's perception of effective leadership is most often congruent with that of his or her supervisors, as opposed to the perception of his or her subordinates. However, selected development competencies are associated with subordinate ratings (Hooijberg & Choi, 2000). Interestingly, subordinate ratings have in fact been found to be the most highly correlated across all other sources (Scullen et al., 2003). In addition, Brutus et al. (1999) concluded that a manager's selection goals for development generally follow the key areas identified by subordinates and peers, as opposed to those identified by management.

By contrast, the female group were more concerned with the rankings received from management, although there was no clear agreement that they would confront management for clarity; in fact they indicated a preference for avoiding this particular route. It was the female group who highlighted the importance of management rankings by stating: "Your manager's ratings sort of dominates the whole score". The fact that the female participants did not wish to confront management to discuss these particular issues is surprising because research by Vilkinas and Cartan (1997) indicates that females are far better at exerting influence on their boss than male managers.

To summarise: Research confirming the potential reason for the above reactions states that managers may have what is termed an “approach avoidance reaction” to feedback, which entails a keen willingness to understand the perceptions of those around them, yet a concern about learning of their weaknesses (McCauley & Moxley, 1999). As a result and in support of the experience with the current study, managers may then try to control the probability of negative feedback, by means of rationalisation, denial, confrontation or change. However, it is important to note that a study conducted by Vilkinas and Cartan (1997) confirmed that gender does not impact on line management’s perception of the individual or his or her level of effectiveness. This would have no influence on the way managers rated the participants, nor contribute to a possible reason for the different reactions to the 360-degree feedback.

4.4.2.5 Subcategory: instrument applicability

The item content and clarity coupled with the ranking process and timing of the tool impact on the perception of accuracy.

- *Item content.* Role-specific requirements were again highlighted as a variable influencing the validity of item content, that is, the types of competencies the tool assesses and the correlation of these individual roles. Data provided related specifically to the competencies certain raters were required to rank: “It was difficult for me to rate ... I could not always rate them on how they manage their teams ... I mean I work with them on a totally different level”; “Shouldn’t my subordinates’ opinion rate higher than my managers because they are the ones that feel how I impact on them?”; “I don’t use that competency in my current role”. Participants continued emphasising the requirement that all rankings/ratings be focused on their current organisational role. Research evidence supports the opposite, namely that ratees should be ranked on competencies required in the future as opposed to their current organisational roles (Kur & Bunning, 2002).
- *Item clarity.* Ambiguity in terms of understanding the meaning of different items was introduced as an additional factor influencing the accuracy of 360-degree feedback results. The following concerns were raised: “A lot of the questions had two meanings, the first part I would think yes, mostly describes but the last part I would think no, least describes”; “The

questions were too wide”; “Where two peers have answered the question differently they have interpreted that the question is asking for something different or slightly different”. However, Theron (2000) cautions that different interpretations of the same question do not mean that one interpretation is more or less correct than the other and that both should be considered in the relevant context.

- *Ranking process.* In describing the ranking process, all groups agree that ranking was not a suitable method; nor did it provide an accurate reflection of participants’ competencies. This, in turn, influenced the negative perception of the accuracy of the tool: “It becomes a picking exercise”; “So now I slot what I thinkish into those areas but it is not what I really believe”; “In a lot of cases you could put them into two categories but you have to put them into one”; “You had to box”; “I found it restrictive”. What participants were particularly unhappy about was the fact that the ranking process “boxed” individuals: “Because it is a forced ranking”; “It is too coarse”; “I found it restricting”. A possible reason for this was that, a study conducted by Antonini (1996) indicates that ratees more often prefer written descriptive feedback, finding this far more helpful than rating scale data. This is because the rating scales do not always provide useful information on others’ expectations - hence the difficulty individuals experience in linking necessary behaviour to change. It can be confirmed that characteristics of the rating system do impact on the ratings the rater may provide (Facteau et al., 1998).

According to the organisation coordinators, the ranking process was viewed as less judgemental, less evaluative and a way in which bias could be reduced. Although the ranking process is not regarded as flawless, Paramenter (2000) suggests that competencies be ranked in order of importance, but that section headings be provided where respondents are asked to rate the top five competencies.

- *Timing.* The time provided was viewed as being insufficient: “One is not going to sit here for three hours ticking everything off and reorganising”; “It was done very quickly, it was kind of sent out to everyone and you had to quickly choose people that might have worked with you before”; “I know it is based on perception, I just think it was done too quickly”. The leadership academy group mentioned the need to link the process to their work environment as opposed to the management groups who were of the opinion that perhaps a separate initiative,

outside of the work context would be more suitable. According to Zenger, Ulrich and Smallwood (2000), although formalised sessions should occur in order to shield participants from their jobs, the focus is moving towards leadership skills being developed on the job. The main purpose of this is to allow employees to function as co-development partners and ensure that discrepancies with employee perceptions will diminish (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004).

4.4.3 Category: perception of usefulness of the tool

According to the research provided, usefulness is determined by meeting the requirements on three different levels which were termed “interpersonal”, “intrapersonal” and “organisational”. As explained during axial coding, the word “intrapersonal” refers directly to self-development while “interpersonal” refers directly to improved subordinate management. Both are linked to the initial category of change, determining the type of change (intrapersonal - interpersonal) as well as the value to the ratee and organisation.

The importance of this category should be emphasised because Funderberg and Levy (1997) caution that the 360-degree feedback process will be unsuccessful if it is not supported by its users and shown to add value, that is viewed as a useful process.

4.4.3.1 Subcategory: interpersonal usefulness

The degree to which the 360-degree feedback process is viewed as being useful depends on whether it fulfils the role of facilitating performance management, subordinate management and improving relationships and communication between managers and subordinates.

Although resistance was initially evident among participants, they did admit that it “can be used as an objective lever” and that “it is useful for managing subordinates”. A supporting example was: “As a tool to manage the performance of subordinates I think it is a useful tool”. There was agreement among the focus groups that it could be a useful tool in improving relationships between management and subordinates: “I think it could be a really useful way of good dialogue between management and their employees”. However, owing to the lack of commitment from

management and the perception of leadership in the organisation, few participants were comfortable using this as a point of discussion with management.

Gender differences were again evident in this particular conceptual link. The majority of the female participants agreed that the 360 degree process should replace the usual performance appraisal process because it is viewed as being a far more objective and “fair evaluation”: “I think this is much more constructive and lets you know who thinks what of you, which is very good because it comes from a number of different angles”. Another comment was: “They both have different places”, demonstrating the resistance of the participants to using it for evaluative purposes, despite confirming the value. The male group never mentioned the replacement of the performance appraisals system as the female group had, but ironically viewed it as a useful way to manage subordinates: “As a tool to manage the performance of subordinates, I think it is a useful tool”. Because they work in a male-dominated environment, female participants would prefer an objective opinion. They appeared to be far more open to change and adaptation, whereas the male managers seemed threatened by it. Hence the male group addressed rater bias by confronting subordinates, while the female participants were more interested in gaining approval from management, instead of confrontation.

Research by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) established that for a leadership development programme to be successful, it should promote the development of three competencies to enable leaders to have self-management capability, social capabilities and work facilitation capabilities. Moving from intrapersonal to interpersonal skills impacts on the organisation’s effectiveness.

4.4.3.2 Subcategory: intrapersonal usefulness

An increase in an individual’s level of self-awareness, coupled with appropriate identification of leadership competencies for focused development and gap closure, influences the perceived usefulness of the 360 degree process as a tool in leadership development.

- *Increased self-awareness.* According to Morgan, Cannan and Cullinane (2005), self-awareness is a key criterion for good leadership. Although the process of 360-degree feedback process consists of a number of flaws, it increased the participant's level of self-awareness: "So you learned a lot about yourself through that and how different people perceive you"; "It was actually like having a mirror"; "I think I got a lot out of it ... was the whole self-awareness thing". In support of this study, McCarthy and Garavan (1999) state that the key to 360-degree feedback is an increase in individuals' self-awareness as a direct result of understanding that their perceptions differ from those around them. "The most helpful thing for me was realising that my perception deviated from other people's perception of me"; "I was confronting the hard truth about myself"; "So I got a couple of things that I think maybe, if I had not gone through this, would not necessarily realise or work with this stuff"; "It has given me the opportunity to sit back and take stock of myself".

However, a study conducted by Mabey (2001) cautions researchers to note the fact that individuals do not always find that the process provides a particularly different understanding of themselves as demonstrated above, but instead serves the purpose of reinforcing the direction of their development.

- *Identification of leadership competencies and areas for development.* Feedback met the objective of providing all participants with information on development needs: "I can identify that this is where, as a manager, leader I need to enhance my skills"; "I understand where the shortfalls are and the shortcomings".

The male group seemed comfortable that the process had highlighted the leadership competencies required for them to be efficient leaders in the organisation, and again emphasised the focus on competencies required to perform their current function effectively. The referred to this as a priority: "First of all I needed it to help me recognise what are the leadership competencies I require to do my job well". Their focus was on the feedback received from subordinates and, in support of this, Alimo-Metcalfe (1998) states that individuals most often select competencies that will have a visible impact on the subordinates' perceptions.

The female group however, seemed focused on understanding what was generic to the organisation: “But what Organisation X needs to tell us is which ones they want us to have in order to progress”; “I really think it is important that we understand what Organisation X wants us to work on because if you change anything you will reshuffle that pack, and if you are doing it for the worst then why do it?”

The leadership academy group is the only group that took ownership for the situation: “You will have a choice though, because it is always up to you ... start looking at those areas you want to work on ... those areas that will make you a better leader”. Many of these participants are not in leadership roles and the security of being selected to join the leadership academy provides security in terms of their career progression in the organisation.

To summarise: The management levels of the organisation are more uncertain about the competencies they should develop and are the most resistant to taking full ownership.

- *Gap closure.* Discrepancies between ratee’s self-rankings and rater’s rankings were not termed “development needs” by the focus groups but rather as “gaps” that needed to be closed: “Discrepancies should actually start to close”. They were also termed “weaknesses” and “vulnerabilities”, demonstrating the negative connotation surrounding them.

A 360-degree feedback system will have little value if leaders do not use the feedback they receive as a basis for developing their leadership skills (Faction et al., 1998). However, Fletcher (2001) stresses the fact that although ratings may become more positive over time, this is not an indication that performance has improved. Better ratings and higher levels of self-other agreement could be a result of self-presentation and disclosure as well as impression management (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995). This is clearly evident in the case of managers wanting to “fix” the perceptions of subordinates or achieve a “10/10 score”.

Outcomes of leadership interventions may not always result in behavioural change due either because of the defence mechanisms adopted by leaders or the unwillingness to change (Day, 2000). In order to be effective, leaders need to accept the feedback as being both accurate and useful. There is also evidence to support the fact that even though the accuracy perception may

not be at the 100 percent level, individuals agree that the process may still be useful. The link at this stage seems to be the result an increase in self-awareness which impacts on some form of self-development, even if this occurs subconsciously: “There are glitches but it definitely is useful as it leads to some form of self-awareness”.

An interesting comment made by one of the participants about the process should be noted under this conceptual link: “There are always going to be some kind of inaccuracies because there are so many variables that make up a person”. This demonstrates that the participants understand that the process is not flawless but that their expectations of the process are realistic. In conclusion, although perceived accuracy impacts on the usefulness of the process, the immediate outcome of self-awareness renders it useful.

4.4.4 Category: contextual factors

4.4.4.1 Subcategory: Individual factors

Perceived accuracy of the 360 degree process is influenced by the level of trust individuals have in the organisation and their management.

- *Level of trust.* Data from the research study demonstrates that the participants openly admitted that trust was a concern: “Suppose it is a trust issue but I don’t think it can be an effective leadership tool the way it is used at the moment”. Participants who trusted their direct manager seemed comfortable to address development gaps with their manager: “I trust him and would be happy to share my results with him”. If a lack of trust was evident, participants indicated feeling threatened and had a clear preference for avoiding discussing the results with their manager: “What if it is used against you”?

Trust has become a priority for organisational leaders today as this is viewed, according to Golesorkhi (2006) it is viewed as a critical element in ensuring organisational effectiveness. Ensuring that trust is established across all levels in organisations is important, and its results include effective relationships and fostering attitudes that ultimately impact on organisation’s bottom line (Ferres, Connell & Travaglione, 2004).

The level of ownership and commitment of individuals influences the amount, duration and type of change resulting from the 360-degree feedback process.

- *Ownership for development.* The only group that seemed comfortable with taking full ownership of their development was the leadership academy group: “The person must have a strong belief in what he or she is doing”. This can once again be attributed to the fact that his or her development and feedback took place outside of the work environment and possibly in a more protected environment.

The male group, however, was rather dissatisfied with the realisation that they would have to spend their own time following through and developing their leadership competencies: “I soon realised I am going to have to handle this myself , in its entirety afterwards to make it worth anything”. Their commitment is evident in the comment: “This might be one of the reasons why it might fail in this organisation”. They seemed to be in search of solutions, processes to follow and lacked guidance: “I am not sure how to hand this”; “It doesn’t give you any steps toward improving your leadership competencies”; “It doesn’t offer solutions”. Responsibility was shifted: “There should be someone following through and actually seeing what is happening”. The shift was evident to Human Resources: “Someone from HR should really take this further meaningfully”. According to Antonini (1996), in order to avoid a shift in responsibility, a key factor in any 360 degree process is to ensure that managers are educated and able to process feelings associated with unexpected negative feedback and set specific goals and action plans.

In order to effect behaviour change, participants must take ownership of their own development and success (Fletcher, 2001). Day (2000) confirmed that although perceived usefulness and accuracy of the 360 degree process are essential for its effectiveness, individuals’ willingness and openness to change also play an important role. Hence, individual characteristics play a vital part in ensuring that the process is accepted, in particular with reference to the way they are channelled to achieve work output (Paramenter, 2000).

- *Commitment.* Individual commitment to development is influenced by a number of factors, one of the most prominent being time management: “I will see if I have the time”; “I will have to do it after hours”. This is supported by Shriberg et al., (1997) who states that a potentially

significant obstacle to leadership change is that individuals often have insufficient time to incorporate feedback results and efforts into the work situation

4.4.4.2 Subcategory: organisational factors

The amount of support received from management, Human Resources and the organisation's initiative to follow through on the development gaps identified assists in managing the perceived usefulness of the process.

There is evidence that many of the individuals are hesitant to hold full ownership/accountability for their development and emphasise the need they have to obtain organisation, management and HR support. This is confirmed by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) who state that the importance of support be highlighted because of its role in engendering self-efficacy that will result in more efforts by individuals to master the challenges they perceive in difficult situations. The accountabilities of each role player differ across organisations, all of which are responsible for providing some form of recognition to sustained effort and ongoing feedback to recipients (Hazucha et al., 1993).

- *Management support.* Participants explained that managers were not committed to the process and that this was a “have to do” exercise. This was reflected in a comment made by the participants: “They really give lip service to it but they are not really committed to it and not that keen on it because it looks at the softer issues that we don’t really have time for”. This, in turn, influences their view of the relevance and true usefulness of the process, questioning their reason for change. Further extracts from the data highlight individuals’ belief that management support is an essential component of the process: “Each boss should use it as a tool to develop their direct reports and not see it as another chore we have to do”. In a non-threatening, development environment this should be the sensible route in helping individuals to develop appropriate career plans in line with organisation requirements. However, this was not the case: “I wish my manager had sat with me, face-to-face and given me the feedback”. This requirement was mentioned by the female group in particular, who wanted to use this as an opportunity to communicate with their line management.

This correlates with research by Hazucha et al, (1993) who found that all individuals who received more support from their supervisor reported putting in more effort into their development and engaged in more developmental activities.

- *Human Resources (HR) support.* Although development plans require management and individual interaction and agreement on objectives, it is interesting to see how these focus groups were insistent on the role that HR should fulfil: “I don’t know how we are going to find the time and support from someone from HR to really help take this further really meaningfully”; “It is very difficult to know what you should work on and maybe we actually need to have some kind of session, one-on-one sessions with HR and for them to say to us you know, we think these are probably the areas for you to work on”; “Someone from HR, and it is going to be brutal and blunt for some people but someone has to do that and then yes, develop yourself as a good manager and as a good technical person or whatever, but forget about being a leader”; “There is a view that HR is not there for them as well”, “Perhaps they can take us through it so we can understand it a little better”. In this instance, HR is seen as the supporting arm, the side that is responsible for ensuring that the dirty work is done, taking the responsibility away from line management, once again, perhaps a direct correlation with the fear culture discussed earlier.

- *Organisation support.* According to Zenger et al. (2000), the of alignment evident between competencies ranked and organisational objectives is what individuals seek and what makes sense to individuals. It was also confirmed that this alignment will impact on their willingness and ability to change. However, although alignment is required, studies conducted indicate that it is not unusual for organisations to adopt 360-degree feedback initially, without a clear understanding of how it will actually be aligned with a number of other aspects of the human resources policy (Armstrong, 2001; Morgan et al., 2005).

Although clear direction and guidance is sought from the organisation, participants highlighted the communication gap: “I don’t think this organisation is big on the communication strategy”. Some form of communication from the organisation was deemed necessary for follow-through: “Just give people some kind of systematic approach to the next step because, I mean one of the shortfalls in this whole process is that there is just one step” ... “Who do I sit with and define

which are the ones I really need to work on”. Direction from the organisation is sought in terms of how to identify competencies for development: “It would be nice if somebody could sit with us and sit and say, “you know, you need to shuffle this deck completely and get those ones that are at the top at the bottom”; “We need to define leadership in this organisation”.

Although some form of communication is sought, Facticeau et al. (1998) focus on the fact that because 360-degree feedback is most often used for development, access to individual results is often limited to the ratees themselves. Hence organisations have only a limited ability to monitor or enforce this feedback for employee development. A further factor contributing to the lack of organisation commitment is that the organisation is viewed as not actively including leadership development on their priority list: “It is not a priority”. Participants indicated that they are also in search of reward and recognition for changing and developing positively for the organisation. However, a key concern is that this is not possible unless the organisation provides an environment that encourages leadership development and that data reflect that: “The environment does not encourage leaders to develop”.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that, in support of the data, Morgan et al. (2005) caution that commitment to action is of vital importance and if follow-up activity does not ensue, there is a danger of the system losing credibility. Evidently, for 360-degree feedback to be successful, a number of human resources and strategic organisational factors need to be linked to organisational performance and require an open and participative culture (Atwater & Waldman, 1998). This is confirmed by Maurer et al. (2002) namely that support for development is critical for the success of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development.

4.4.5 Category: present information

4.4.5.1 Subcategory: leadership perceptions

Individual’s current perception of leadership influences the perceived usefulness of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development.

There was common agreement that a general lack of leadership is evident in the organisation: “We have a leadership crisis”; “Leadership is nonexistent”. The lack of leader role models was also a concern for participants: “We have very little in terms of leaders who stand out”. A general theme related to fear was evident in discussing how a possible change to introduce efficient leadership would impact on the current organisation culture: “They are petrified to make a decision”; “We are too afraid of the repercussions and what everyone else will think”; “When I have to make an important decision I refer upward because I know what I have to do here but I am too afraid and think let me cover my back”; “We have got a fear culture”. Participants are of the opinion that the fear has led to the lack of decisiveness among general leaders as well as the lack of empowerment: “I am not capable of leading it enough because I am not empowered enough. I am too scared”. It was evident that participants viewed senior leadership as protecting their power base, demonstrating their resistance to a more open, participative leadership style: “We are not encouraged for various reasons to have the guts to act and say it”; “But aren’t our so-called leaders scared to have other leaders below them in case ...”; “If you are a natural leader ... you are going to get hammered for it”. The culture of the organisation was not viewed as being conducive to developing or welcoming new leaders: “We don’t have an environment climate which allows leaders to grow”; “And you don’t do something that is going to get yourself into trouble”. This is of particular importance in this context because leadership is viewed as an inherently subjective notion (Pounder & Coleman, 2002).

4.4.6 Category: past experience

4.4.6.1 Subcategory: development initiatives

Previous experience with performance management and other development initiatives influences the perception individuals have of the 360-degree feedback process.

All three focus groups agree that the performance management process is a “pen and paper” exercise that has to be done. However, they also agree that, if used appropriately, it could be a useful way in which individuals are measured and their career objectives are reviewed and aligned with the business requirements: “We kind of had thumb-suck evaluations based on well, not knowing what this person is doing. I think they are probably going to merit a whatever

increase ...”; “They don’t take the whole performance appraisal seriously”; “If that process is followed ... it can be a really good thing”.

The reason for the inefficient use of the process is attributed to line management’s lack of commitment: “It only gets done once a year, it is something that HAS to be done”; “Because they haven’t taken the time”. This once again links up with the conceptual link, underscoring the fact that management influence and support are required for a process to be viewed as accurate and value adding (Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; McCauley & Moxley, 1996): “It has to be a tool that is regarded as important by the leadership and then this will flow down”.

With reference to previous development initiatives, the male group in particular seemed somewhat resistant to and negative about the process. They mentioned that all the processes were similar and ended with the same results: “We are just regurgitating”, and were also concerned that the processes carried more weight with individuals than they should: “Do you not think that we overanalyse it?”

To summarise: An individual’s past experience with development initiatives, including the applicability of the initiatives in the work context, follow-through, top management commitment and the competency focus influences the subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development. This is deduced from the research study and, in her literature review the researcher did not identify supporting literature

4.4.7 Category: demographics

The subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development is influenced by gender, age, level in the organisation and the context of the 360-degree process.

- *Male focus group.* The male group’s focus was on changing the perceptions of the subordinates and managers: “We must focus on changing their perceptions”. They viewed the results and discrepant perceptions not as a development gap but rather as something that was “broken” and could easily be repaired: “We must fix it”. The lower rankings were described as

“problems” and “weaknesses” as opposed to development gaps. Their main focus was on aligning perceptions and being evaluated at a higher score: “We must score 10/10”. Ironically they focused on increasing a rating while they received feedback on the ranking method. Research indicates that males showed significantly greater agreement with report, self- and supervisor ratings compared with females because of the narrower focus on the part of males in evaluating their role and level of achievement in a job or career (Furnham & Stringfield, 2001).

Evidently the process was experienced as evaluative by the male group who, because they feel threatened, did not focus their development on improving their leadership skills or selecting appropriate competencies for self- and organisational improvement. Instead, they focused on changing perceptions of others by confronting them, challenging their expectations and attempting to meet these. According to research, this is described as impression management (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997; Wimer, 2002).

- *Female focus group.* The female focus group was extremely defensive about the outcome of the process and were seen to attack the organisation. They rarely make specific mention of management or subordinates: “The organisation is quick to point fingers at your weaknesses and vulnerabilities” – this sentence almost indicates that they felt “exposed” at a general level, and does not indicate that they trust that the process was confidential and for their own development. Again the focus is on the lower rankings being considered weaknesses. The negative connotation continued to be evident in this group.

However, this was the only group that expressed a need for some form or reinforcement to elicit change in the direction required by the company: “There is almost a ‘why should I?’ attitude”; “what benefit is there for me?”; “If I do this and achieve x what is the reward?”. This is perhaps because of the fact that they have difficulty separating their personal and professional roles: “Why should I change my personality for this organisation?”, taking the development and change to be elicited extremely personally. They also felt that rankings should be provided by relatives for a more holistic view: “Perhaps we should get our spouses to evaluate us as well”. When a woman assumes a leadership role, she brings her gender to the role, culturally defined female aspects, as an integrated part of her personal history and her profession (Lorenzen, 1996).

This sentiment was echoed by the leadership academy group, aligning leadership roles with those of a parent: “If you are a parent, surely you are a leader to your children and you exhibit those qualities there”.

A general comment is that both the female and male groups seemed to lose the focus of the confidentiality factor as well as the development nature but viewed it instead as an evaluative process. The question of trust is definitely a concern at this stage because regardless of how the process was described and implemented, individuals still maintained that this was not the real situation: “I am not quite sure what they want to do with these results”; “What if it is used against me?”

According to research, women’s conceptions of career success are often focused on surviving against all odds in the world of work. Women value being seen as experts in their field, having intrinsically interesting jobs, personal accomplishment, self-development and balancing work and personal life (Sturges, 1999).

By contrast, men see career success in terms of climbing ladders and gaining influence with the external trappings of success including high salary, car and status (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003) – justifying why the approach is different (i.e. women focus on what is important to them).

- *Leadership Academy focus group.* This group was far more positive about the change and focused on changing for self-improvement and self-development. There was no evidence of defensiveness but rather an acceptance of the results and discrepancies presented: “Well, this is how people are seeing me, I need to do something to change it”; “I think that it has been an incredible experience and will influence your interaction with people”. The positive attitude was evident “because things can be changed ... for the better”, but most importantly they emphasised the need for ownership: “That if you really want to change and really want to improve, do this properly, be honest with yourself and that was obviously a huge challenge”. Although they realised the challenge and the effort to change for self-improvement, they were motivated to do so. A possible influencing factor could be that top executives often have limited access to negative leadership feedback, infact even limited openness to receiving this type of feedback. They are also often judged by far stricter

standards than middle or upcoming managers (Manning, 2002). Fletcher et al. (1998) also indicated that older managers are often rated lower than their younger counterparts.

One inference made was that because of the nature of the development focus, away from the corporate environment and the combination with other development initiatives as well as appropriate follow-through and coaching, the outcome, despite its flaws, was viewed positively and accepted.

In essence, this section has provided, a set of conceptual linkages related specifically to the two categories related to “perceptions” and to the participants’ “reactions”. The researcher therefore saturated these categories and initiated the selective coding process.

4.5 SELECTIVE CODING

Integration at a higher abstract level was evident in the formulation of conceptual linkages and the researcher ensured that any data not related to the main categories of “perceptions” and “reactions” be delimited that is, although demographic information had an important role to play in this research study, there was no concrete evidence that this had influenced the subjective experience of the process.

4.5.1 Conceptualising the core category

In a review of the research study and data presented, two core categories were identified in forming the basis of the theory to define “a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development”, namely:

- 1) reaction
- 2) perception

In general, the two core categories are described as follows:

- *Reaction.* Immediately after receiving feedback, individuals react to the process. Reaction

occurs at three different levels including emotional, cognitive and action orientation. At this stage action orientation is defined as integration indicating that confrontation, verification and gap closure are actions. There is a general trend in the way these reactions occur: first, individuals have an emotional reaction, which is followed by a cognitive reaction whereby they rationalise, deny or accept a particular emotion. This, in turn, leads to an action. Hence the action-related reaction is dependent on the cognitive reaction, that is, when rationalisation regarding subordinates' understanding of the role occurs, managers verify this by confronting subordinates in contrast to when acceptance of discrepant perceptions occurs and individuals focus on development actions to close gaps. The final outcome of an individual's subjective experience is therefore based on the reactions the individual has to the 360-degree feedback process. This is because the reaction is influenced by, and in turn, influences the individual's perception. A literature review supporting the above stated information is presented in the next chapter, when the substantive theory is discussed.

- *Perception.* The process highlighted the important role of the perceived accuracy and usefulness of a process in influencing a manager's subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process. This is supported by Day (2000) who states that for feedback systems to be effective, managers need to accept the feedback as being both accurate and useful. However, because senior managers often view feedback as being evaluative and judgemental (Jones & Bearley, 1996), in consensus with data extracts, Garavan et al. (1997) explain that feedback received is often rationalised because managers believe that their subordinates and peers do not really understand the pressures they are under: "They don't see how I fight for them in meetings, I buffer them".

Perceptions are formed on the basis of individuals' experiences and are related to elements such as rater motivation, selection and level of interaction, management trust and support as well as tool applicability and even the background of the feedback provider.

Building on the final stage of the grounded theory analysis, the researcher reviewed memos and conceptual linkages to ensure that the two main categories described above were all encompassing of the critical elements of the substantive theory being developed. Based on the grounded theory, and what Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocate, only one core category should

be identified and defined in terms of its properties and dimensions, forming the substantive theory.

Hence, after much deliberation, the researcher identified that the core category was in fact “**perceptive impact**”. The reason for this is the fact that the properties and dimensions of both reaction and perception formed the foundational elements of the analytic framework defining subjective experience. In other words, the properties and dimensions of “perceptive impact”, as reflected in the table below, were congruent with what constituted the “subjective experience” of managers.

In defining the core category, the researcher stated the main properties and dimensions in table 4.24.

Table 4.24 Core category: perceptive impact

Core category	Properties	Dimensions
Perceptive impact	Accuracy	High - low
	Utility	High - low
	Reaction	Emotional - cognitive - action

The formal definition that formed the basis of the theory developing process in the study was formulated as follows:

Perceptive impact constitutes the outcome or influence of an individual’s perception of a particular event or experience. This outcome or influence is dependent on the individual’s reaction to the event or experience, the level of accuracy perceived by the individual as well as the utility of the outcome or influence. Hence it is the perceptive impact that essentially constitutes the subjective experience.

In support of the above, the current study provides research evidence that the managers who participated in the 360-degree feedback process and focus group interviews reported that although a number of flaws were still evident in the process, it did have a powerful impact on them (Fletcher et al., 1998). Therefore, although managers may be less likely to perceive lower ratings as accurate, they may still believe that this feedback is useful for development (Facteau et al., 1998).

With the definition of the core category and the integrated findings of the conceptual linkages, the researcher had sufficient supporting information to formulate the basic substantive theory. This theory will be described in detail in the final chapter because it is an appropriate conclusion to the research study aims.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the data analysis process the researcher performed once all the focus group interviews had been transcribed. The researcher moved through each coding process with the assistance of memos, conceptualising processes and identifying properties and dimensions. Categories were theoretically defined, and as relationships between them emerged, subcategories were identified and relationships highlighted.

Axial coding provided the researcher with the tools to analyse categories in terms of causal, consequential and conditional variables assisted in the emergence of conceptual linkages. The researcher integrated data from the research with literature reviews to ensure that these linkages were explained in detail, preparing the phase of selective coding in which a more abstract level of integration was evident. This ensured that the researcher was working with conceptual linkages which, although still emerging, were supported by the evidence already collected.

The final chapter will conclude the research study in terms of literature and operational aims, thus finalising the formulated substantive theory. The limitations of the study will be discussed and recommendations made for both the organisation and future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will conclude the research study in terms of a summary highlighting the main elements of the literature and operational aims. The substantive theory will then be formulated and discussed. The limitations of both the literature review and the research study will be discussed and recommendations made for the organisation to improve the implementation of 360-degree feedback as well as future research.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions pertaining to the literature review and research study are provided and discussed below.

5.1.1 Conclusion of the literature review

The literature review had the following four specific aims that were achieved during this research study:

- 1) Conceptualise leadership and leadership development.
- 2) Conceptualise the need for leadership development in the current organisational climate.
- 3) Conceptualise how 360-degree feedback as a tool is developed and implemented, and its impact.
- 4) Conceptualise the purpose, benefits and challenges of using the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development.

5.1.1.1 Conceptualise leadership and leadership development

Leadership was conceptualised as a collective relationship involving motivating others and achieving common, mutual organisational goals through others (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). The critical importance of a leader's ability to have insight into himself/ herself was highlighted as a key area of competence every leader should have, hence the focus on leadership development initiatives in organisations.

It was ascertained that leadership development initiatives are introduced with a view to building leadership capacity in organisations, applicable to both current and potential leaders. The main focus of these initiatives is to increase individual self-awareness, which is deemed to be the foundation of leadership development.

5.1.1.2 Conceptualise the need for leadership development in the current organisational climate

The literature confirms that the constantly changing environment needs leaders who are able to adapt effectively and to facilitate organisational adjustment to market requirements (Feinberg et al., 2005; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). Flatter organisations, globalisation and growing virtual work have been identified, inter alia, as key factors resulting in the increasing complex and challenging environment in which individuals are required to operate (Green, 2002). It was confirmed that leaders can be developed and hence the need for organisations to focus on developing suitable and successful leaders was justified.

5.1.1.3 Conceptualise how 360-degree feedback as a tool is developed and implemented, and the impact thereof

The literature emphasised that developing and implementing a 360-degree feedback process takes a considerable amount of time, effort and challenge in any organisation (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995; Garavan et al., 1997; Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999; Theron, 2000). A five-phase approach was highlighted in the literature review, which explains the key elements organisations should consider when developing and implementing a 360-degree feedback process. These phases include: identifying the leadership competencies required by the organisation; selecting or developing an appropriate instrument through which to conduct the 360-degree feedback process; selecting and preparing raters and ratees for the process; implementing the 360-degree feedback process following strict systematic guidelines; giving and receiving feedback; and finally aligning the process with some form of individual development plan.

There is evidence in the literature that 360-degree feedback elicits a number of reactions on part of the participants (Facteau et al; 1998; Jansen & Vloeberghs, 1999) which influences whether

they will accept the results of the process and ultimately use the results to improve their performance (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000; Funderberg & Levy, 1997). These reactions vary according to the type of feedback received, that is, negative feedback results in denial and rationalisation, whereas positive feedback commonly results in individuals focusing on formalising a developmental plan. Other factors impacting on feedback acceptance and use include characteristics of the feedback provider, individuals' degree of feedback orientation, their belief about change and also their perceived need to change; their focus on setting goals and their perception of the purpose of the 360-degree feedback process being evaluative or developmental.

It is the implementation of the process and the impact on individuals' reactions to the process that form the basis of understanding the real benefits and challenges of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development.

5.1.1.4 Conceptualise the purpose, benefits and challenges of using the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development

The literature review identified the two main purposes of using 360-degree feedback in organisations, the first being evaluative and the second developmental (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). For the purpose of the research study it was concluded that, as the leadership development process occurred in isolation of performance, pay or promotional decisions it would therefore only be discussed and considered in its developmental capacity. Using the appropriate benefits and challenges of the process as a development tool were identified.

The main developmental aim of the 360-degree feedback process is its focus on increasing individual self-awareness. This allows for insight into one's strengths and development needs identified by a number of different sources. It is this very aspect that is viewed as the most beneficial of the 360-degree feedback process. Green (2002) highlights the reason for this in stating that intrapersonal awareness forms the foundation for leadership development and will ultimately result in improved interpersonal awareness, improving overall organisational competence and interaction. Another key benefit is the fact that the 360-degree feedback process affords subordinates an opportunity to rate their manager. This is important because they are the

very source leaders used to achieve organisational objectives (Scullen et al., 2003; Valle & Bozeman, 2002).

However, although one of the main benefits of 360-degree feedback is the fact that it offers far greater objectivity, it does have a number of shortcomings in terms of the quality and accuracy of the results provided (Fletcher et al., 1998). According to Day (2000), one of the reasons for this is, that 360-degree feedback as a developmental strategy is strong on assessment but lacks in challenge and support. The need for strong management and overall organisational commitment and support was highlighted by Jansen and Vloeberghs, (1999), McCauley and Moxley, (1996) and Thach (2002).

Rater bias is also a critical influencing factor that impacts on the accuracy of the results. Different types of bias were explained. In particular, the amount and level of interaction raters had with the ratee appeared to influence the accuracy of the ratings provided.

With the main aim of leadership development initiatives being performance improvement, Smither et al. (2005), caution that multiple administrations of a feedback programme have been suggested as a requirement prior to any significant improvements being observed.

5.1.2 Contributions of the literature review to the research study

The literature review contributed to the research study for the following reasons:

- It conceptualised and provided a definition and clear understanding of the concepts of leadership, leadership development and 360-degree feedback.
- It clarified the essential elements of an effective 360-degree feedback process to be implemented in an organisation.
- It ascertained that the main aim of any feedback process is self-awareness and that this forms the basis for leadership development.
- It provided a brief explanation of different individual reactions to feedback including denial and rationalisation.
- It confirmed that the reactions of individuals to the 360-degree feedback process influence their acceptance of the process as well as the degree to which they view it as

being useful, impacting, in turn, on the degree to which it will result in improved performance.

- It identified a number of factors influencing individuals' reactions to 360-degree feedback, including biographical characteristics, individual factors, contextual factors, cognitive and emotional processes and job-relevant experience.

With the assistance of the literature review, the researcher was able to gain a clear understanding of the 360-degree feedback process, the raters, the challenges and the impacting factors. This helped the researcher to understand the background factors that potentially influence the subjective experience of the participants and facilitated the formulation of the substantive theory.

5.1.3 Conclusion of the research study

In this section, the researcher will briefly highlight how the research study met the operational aims identified in the first chapter. This is followed by a discussion of the substantive theory derived as an end product of the grounded theory study.

The operational aims that were initially formulated were as follows:

- Conceptualise the term “subjective experience” in the understanding of the particular organisation’s managers.
- Identify and describe common themes in managers’ subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool.
- Identify and describe the factors that impact on the subjective experience of managers in the use of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development.

5.1.3.1 Conceptualise the term “subjective experience” in the understanding of current organisation managers.

The term “subjective experience” was conceptualised with a clear definition and a diagram highlighting how the main identified elements of “subjective experience” were interrelated.

The definition was conceptualised as follows:

Subjective experience is the perception and emotional/cognitive response of an individual towards a particular event/experience. These perceptions and responses are not measurable and are influenced by current contextual factors, past experience and the information available”.

5.1.3.2 *Identify and describe common themes in a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a leadership development tool*

The following main elements were identified in the definition of subjective experience and formed the basis of the analytic framework used in inductively populating the grounded theory process:

- perceptions
- cognitive reactions
- emotional response
- impacting factors, including: present information, past experience and context (organisation and individual)

According to the research collated during the grounded theory process, the elements of a manager’s subjective experience were grouped as follows:

- **Perceptions.** These consisted of the manager’s perception of the accuracy of the process as well as his or her perception of the usefulness of the process. These formed the main categories used in the grounded theory process.
- **Cognitive reactions.** Two distinct types were identified during this process, namely denial and rationalisation.
- **Emotional response.** This was considered an emotional reaction.
 - An additional reaction was evident during the grounded theory process, identified as action reaction. It included verification or the identification and closure of development gaps.
 - Cognitive reaction, emotional reaction and action reaction were grouped under the category, “**reaction**”.

- **Impacting factors.** The factors identified during the grounded theory study included the following:
 - present information: individual perceptions of leadership in the organisation, current leadership development initiatives in process; development incentives
 - past experience: includes reference in particular to past experience with the performance appraisal system.
 - context: includes individual factors (individual commitment, ownership) and organisational factors (follow-through, support and direction, including management support)

5.1.3.3 *Identify and describe the factors that impact on the subjective experience of managers in the use of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development*

The influencing factors were grouped under the subcategories that impacted on or influenced the category, **accuracy perception**. These will be highlighted below with specific reference to the identified properties:

- rater bias: rater motivation, rater commitment, rater effort, interaction with the rater (top management as a rater were a critical influencing factor on the process)
- skewed results: level of clarity and role-specific relationship, both related to the feedback provider
- feedback process: methodical versus interactive, the degree to which the process provided sufficient alignment to organisational objectives
- instrument applicability: time allocation, suitability of ranking process, item content and item clarity

These subcategories, in conjunction with the subcategories presented under 5.1.3.2, including present information, past experience and contextual factors, impact on the degree to which the 360 degree process is **perceived as useful** in leadership development. Managers assess the perceived usefulness on the basis of the type, amount, duration and level of change the process results in, on an intrapersonal (self development), interpersonal (subordinate development,

improved relations with manager and colleagues) and/or organisational level (improved organisational functioning).

Managers' subjective experience of 360-degree feedback constitutes three essential elements including reaction, perceived accuracy and perceived utility. These will be used as subheadings to explain the substantive theory and meeting the final operational aim as highlighted in chapter 1.

5.2 FORMULATING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

For ease of reference, the substantive theory will be explained in accordance with the headings **reaction**, **accuracy perception** and **perceived usefulness**. Although past experience, present information and contextual factors are not included in this section as main discussion points their relevance to and impact on the theory are implicit and will become evident as the substantive theory is explained.

- *Reaction*. The initial impact of the 360-degree feedback process is self-awareness as managers are exposed, often for the first time, to the perceptions of others regarding their leadership competence.

Initial responses to self-awareness and the realisation that their own perceptions are often discrepant with those around them is first emotional. This is followed by some form of cognitive reaction, and research by Derrberry and Tucker (1992) and D'Amasio (2001) indicates that cognition does not operate alone and seems to be influenced by emotion. However, it is important to note that emotion only comes into play after the managers have had an opportunity to assess the 360-degree feedback process and initial results cognitively (Callahan, Haslar & Tolson., 2005). The cognitive reaction initially serves as a defence mechanism (Day, 2000) owing to the managers' resistance to evaluative and judgemental feedback (Jones & Bearley, 1996). These reactions assume the form of denial, acceptance and rationalisation (Garavan et al., 1997; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004; Ward, 1997). Once individuals have undergone this process, they act on their response in the form of either confronting subordinates or their line managers (verification) or focus on closing identified leadership development gaps. This

ultimately results in some form of change or improvement. Callahan et al. (2005) have also provided research evidence stating that cognition plays a role in influencing emotion in areas such as attributions and appraisals hence the fact that this process replicates itself in the developed theory.

- *Accuracy perception.* The perceived accuracy of the 360 degree process informs the cognitive reaction and action reaction of the managers. What this means is that when managers question the perceived accuracy, they will seek verification of results through confrontation with subordinates. Alternatively, when managers accept the feedback as being accurate, they are comfortable to select development competencies and prepare a developmental plan in line with their identified gaps/needs (Emiliani, 2003).

Manager perceptions of accuracy are influenced by a number of factors including the following:

- rater bias: rater motivation, commitment and level of interaction
- instrument applicability: item content and clarity
- feedback process
- organisational factors: top management support and commitment; organisational culture and commitment; organisational support and direction
- past experience: other development initiative implementation and outcomes
- individual contextual factors: level of ownership and commitment

The outcome of the reaction will inevitably result in some form of change at either an interpersonal, intrapersonal or organisational level, regardless of whether a formal development plan is established. This will impact on the perceived usefulness of the 360-degree feedback instrument.

- *Perceived usefulness.* Self-development seems to occur immediately after receiving 360-degree feedback as managers consciously seek to reduce discrepancies in rating perceptions by changing their behaviour, clearly with the intention of improving their leadership performance. This process is known as self-regulation and is a natural reaction on the part of managers (Cooper & Schmitt, 1995).

With the focus on the intention to improve, the main aim is change. Table 5.1 below highlights that change occurs at three different levels namely intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational levels and is influenced by the types of outcomes in which the 360 degree process results. This table supports the current research study.

Table 5.1 Elements of utility (adapted from Green, 2002; Maurer & Palmer, 1999).

Outcomes	Change impact
Primary reported <u>behaviour change</u>	<u>Intrapersonal:</u> Affects self-awareness, thinking ability and internal functioning.
Secondary beneficial <u>insight</u> or <u>behaviour change</u>	<u>Interpersonal:</u> Impacts on individuals with whom leader interacts
Neutral no benefit is <u>perceived</u>	<u>Organisation:</u> Impacts on organisation as a whole

According to Green (2002), change can result in two important types of outcomes, namely primary and secondary outcomes. An example of primary outcomes, according to this research study, is managers seeking to identify leadership competencies necessary for development in an attempt to close the identified leadership development gaps. This is considered to be a behavioural change. Secondary outcomes are evident in the managers' statement that the "process was useful and enlightening" and that it afforded them an opportunity to understand and receive feedback on the perceptions of others. The 360-degree process provided great insight into the managers' areas of strength and leadership development gaps, the greatest contribution, as mentioned previously, being self-awareness.

Research indicates that self-awareness increases a manager's ability to readily adapt to a variety of organisational requirements and contexts in order to maximise effectiveness (Sosik et al., 2002). This is because managers' self-awareness is aligned with intrapersonal awareness, which is referred to as a secondary outcome. However, Goleman (2002) emphasises that intrapersonal awareness is in fact the foundation of effective leader performance. Consequently, this will lead to an improvement in an individual's interpersonal awareness and result in improved manager relations with subordinates, customers, colleagues and line managers. This ultimately leads to an environment that operates productively with open communication. This research study shows that there is a negative perception of leadership in the organisation that was investigated.

Implementing the 360-degree feedback process was a first attempt by the organisation to improve leadership and develop appropriate leadership competencies. Hence, the 360-degree feedback process, according to Thach (2000) and Rosti and Shipper (1998), may be an effective first step towards change in an organisation.

Change as a result of 360-degree feedback tends to improve the overall functioning of the organisation. Organisational support and follow-through are of vital importance should leadership development result in improved organisational effectiveness (Day, 2000). This is evident from suggestions and recommendations made by participants in the research study.

To summarise: The perceived usefulness of the process will therefore depend then on the nature of change influenced by the perceived accuracy of the 360-degree feedback process (intrapersonal - interpersonal) and a number of intervening variables. These variables include present perception of leadership and leadership development initiatives, past experience with similar initiatives and line management and the organisation's commitment and to the 360-degree feedback process.

It can be concluded from this research that the subjective experience of a manager comprises two essential elements, namely reaction (emotional, cognitive and action) and perception (accuracy and usefulness), both the direct result of an increase in an individual's level of self-awareness. Self-awareness, in turn, results in some form of self-development, which, in the correct context, is considered by Shriberg et al. (1997) to be leadership development. Evidently then a manager's subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process will influence the extent and type of leadership development actions a manager will take, in line with required change, impacting on the effectiveness of leadership development in the organisation. This indicated the importance of understanding the elements of a manager's subjective experience.

Figure 5.1 summarises the substantive theory.

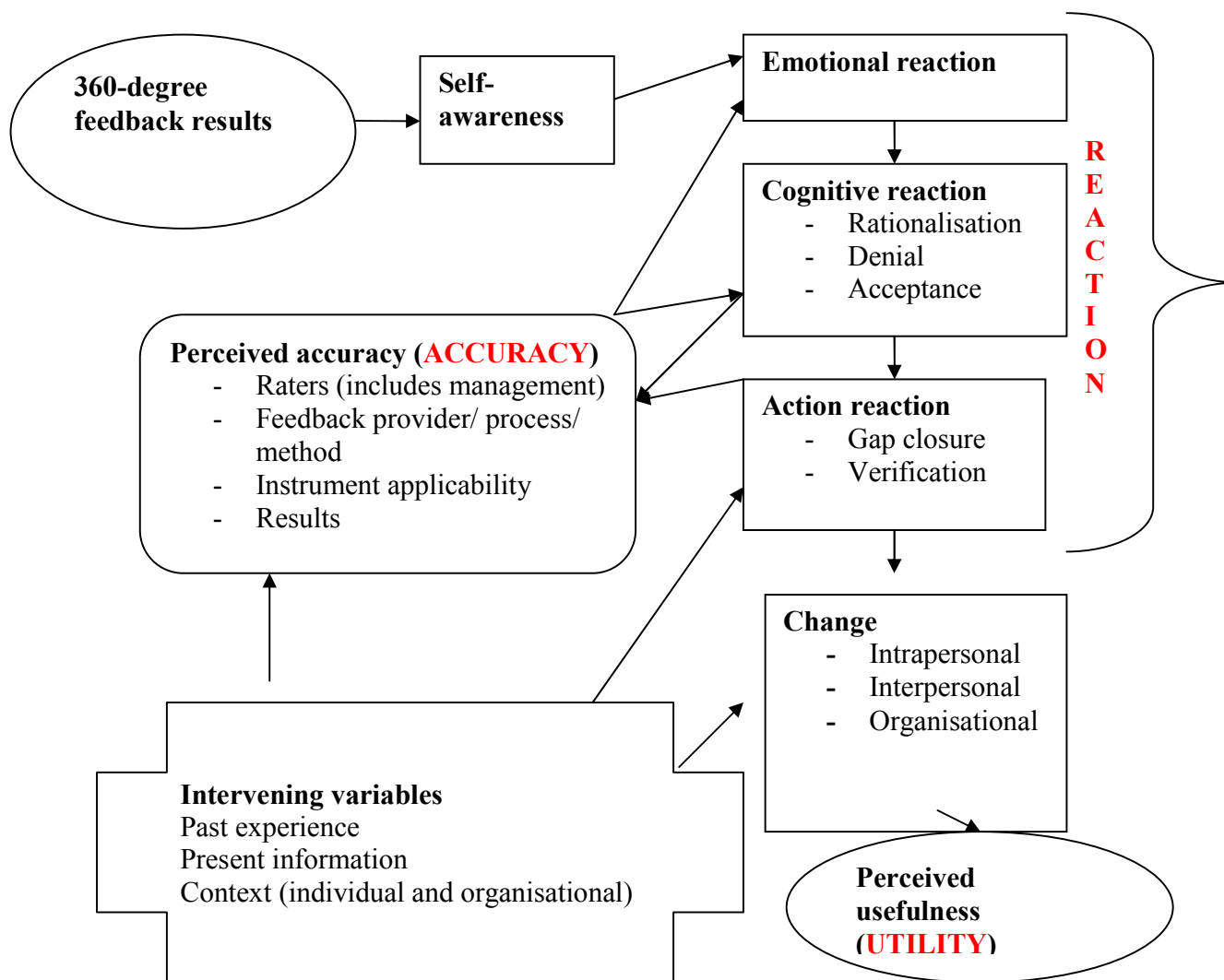


Figure 5.1 **Elements of a manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development: an illustration of the substantive theory** (*The information in bold in parenthesis, represents the properties of the core category identified during selective coding, i.e. “perceptive impact”.)

It is therefore evident then that the subjective experience of managers regarding 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development impacts on the effectiveness of the process (Facteau et al., 1998). This influences the willingness of the managers to use the feedback process to develop appropriate leadership competencies. What managers should ultimately endeavour to achieve is a learning goal orientation whereby they seek to develop new skills and master new situations (Mumford & Gold, 2004). Further research was not conducted into the

managers' development following the 360-degree feedback process, because this was not identified as one of the operational aims of the study.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The researcher identified a number of limitations in both the literature review and the research study. These will be elaborated on in the section below.

5.3.1 Limitations of the literature review

Since this was a grounded theory research design, the researcher did not attempt to develop a biased approach to the research and found that although two limitations were identified in the literature review, sufficient information was provided for the purpose of the research study.

These two limitations were as follows:

- 1) Insufficient literature explaining the subjective experience of managers was accessible to the researcher.
- 2) Literature pertaining to the implementation of the 360-degree feedback process in South African organisations was lacking.

5.3.2 Limitations of the research study

Although all the operational aims of the study were met, there were a few limitations in the actual research study that should be highlighted. These were as follows:

- The range was limited because the sample consisted of the management from one organisation, all located in the same building.
- Although the researcher attempted to ensure a diverse sample in terms of race, the population for the level of management selected for the research study was not sufficiently diverse. Hence the results were applicable to mainly white males and females.

- The third focus group (the leadership academy group) consisted of only four participants because of the unplanned absence of one of them. This could have influenced the generalisability of these results because of an under-representative sample.
- Owing to researcher and participant time constraints, focus group interviews were held during work hours and during budget time. This could have impacted on the participation levels of individuals as well as their negative reactions.
- The researcher did not focus on improving reliability and validity by conducting further research namely individual follow-up interviews. This could have resulted in what Sandelowski (2002) refers to as the “naïve overemphasis” on focus group interview data.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this section is to meet the final operational aim of this dissertation which involves making recommendations both for future research and the organisation, in line with the current study.

5.4.1 Recommendations for future research

- Since the intended product of this study is a tentative “truth claim”, which by Thorne et al., (2004) referred to as being common in the subjective experience of managers toward 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development, researchers should continue to explore meaning and explanations that could highlight the application of a 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development (Thorne et al., 2004).
- Since this study confirms that “subjective experience” is influenced by the perceived usefulness of the process, more effort should be directed towards evaluating individual and organisational development outcomes of the 360-degree feedback process as opposed to initially focusing on determining whether the rankings change over time (Fletcher, 2001).
- A suggestion by Facticeau et al. (1998), which is applicable to this study is that future research should explore additional factors that could be associated with managers’ feedback reaction, such as the amount of feedback leaders are already receiving from

other sources; tenure in leadership role; the self-confidence of leaders and feedback-seeking tendencies.

- Although no significant gender-related issues were evident in this research study, they remain a particularly sensitive issue at work, which necessitates both more research in this area and greater sensitivity on the part of managers (Furnham & Stringfield, 2001)
- Although a study by Robie, Johnson, Nilsen and Hazucha (2001) showed that more similarities than differences across countries were evident in leadership competencies, the definition of effective leadership differed according to what was expected of leaders in different regions. Future research across different geographical areas in the same region in the organisation involved in this study should be encouraged to determine whether this also has an impact on managers' subjective experience.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the organisation

This study highlighted the elements that constitute a manager's subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development. Because the primary aim of the organisation is to build leadership capacity, the link between subjective experience and a manager's willingness to improve his or her performance should be carefully considered. These will, once again be in the format of the categories and subcategories developed as part of the research study.

5.4.2.1 Improving rater participation and reducing rater bias

The following recommendations are relevant:

- Raters should receive training on what strategies to implement in order to prevent rating errors.
- Raters should have sufficient time to carry out the process.

5.4.2.2 Selecting and training feedback providers and improving the feedback process.

The following recommendations apply:

- Feedback providers who have sufficient knowledge of the ratee, their job function and the organisation should be selected.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that the feedback process affords the ratee an interactive opportunity to clarify any misinterpretation.
- Ratees should be equipped with the skills to address the feedback appropriately (Waldman & Bowen, 1998). This could be in the form of pre- and post-360-degree feedback workshops.

5.4.2.3 *Instrument applicability*

The following recommendations are appropriate:

- **Ranking process:** A suggestion by Paramenter (2000) is that should ranking be suitable for the organisation, competency group headings should be considered and raters asked to rank only the top five. Ratings would be applicable to the competency groups.
- **Item content:** Different respondents could apply different weightings, depending on their role in the organisation and their interaction with the ratee.

5.4.2.4 *Organisational commitment and support*

Day (2000) emphasises the necessity of ensuring strong organisational support and follow-through. This facilitates follow-through and links the feedback results to both development and organisational effectiveness.

- The process could be implemented at entry level leadership positions to ensure that potential leaders are afforded challenging opportunities early in their career, on the job (Van der Heijden & Nijhof, 2004).
- Recognition and reward should be afforded to the next generation of leaders (Pernick, 2001). Another post-programme activity suggested by McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) is to ensure follow-through and individual commitment in the use of goal letters. These are letters that participants write to themselves about three or four leadership competencies they select, and establish realistic goals. The organisation should arrange

that these letters remain at a central point and be mailed to participants to ensure they are on track with their development.

- A culture conducive to giving and receiving feedback should be nurtured.
- Although some of the participants in the research study indicated that the process should be incorporated into performance management, Antonini (1996) suggests that organisations use the first two or three years to learn as much as possible about the 360-degree feedback process and focus on increasing employee acceptance prior to using results to make compensation decisions.

One should bear in mind that growth and change in leaders entails motivation, substantial effort, challenge and a willingness to accept risk and setbacks.

5.4.2.5 *Introducing executive coaching to improve manager's subjective experience*

Using coaches, as suggested by Rowan (1998) helps participants to feel valued because they spend time talking about their situation, which in turn, leads to an increase in a leader's understanding of how they can raise their performance through improved processing of information. Leaders who worked with coaches were able to use their multisource feedback to set more specific goals. They were also more likely to share their feedback and solicit ideas from their superiors (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003).

Luthans and Peterson (2003) support this suggestion and add that the benefits of incorporating coaching will result in positive work attitudes, decreased turnover of staff and improved job satisfaction coupled with organisational commitment. Evidently, by assisting leadership development through this process, both individual and organisational performance should improve.

Further evidence suggested by Zenger et al., (2000) indicates that using leaders in the organisation as coaches promotes greater loyalty in the organisation because leaders are able to communicate an expectation of continual improvement and create a work climate of open, direct and candid communication.

Although the above recommendations may not immediately result in improved leader performance, they should help the organisation to address key influencing elements which affect a manager's subjective experience of 360-degree feedback. By attempting to improve a manager's subjective experience, the intrapersonal and interpersonal change will lead to overall improved organisational effectiveness.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature review confirms that although 360-degree feedback is a development initiative still in its trial phase, it is able to ensure optimal leaders' self-awareness and intrapersonal competence. Thach (2002) reports on research showing that 360-degree feedback is one of the best methods to promote increased self-awareness of skill strengths and deficiencies in managers, resulting in improved leadership capacity in the organisation (Waldman & Yammarino, 1999).

In conclusion, the findings of the research study indicate three main elements which impact on a manager's subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development, including reactions and perceptions of accuracy and usefulness. Careful consideration was given to understanding and managing these elements because a manager's subjective experience will determine the degree to which the 360-degree feedback process will promote the development of leaders in the organisation.

This chapter concluded the research study by presenting and explaining the substantive theory. The limitations of the literature review and research study were explained, and recommendations were also made for future research in organisations.

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Appendix A: moderator guide

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

MODERATOR GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP NUMBER

PARTICIPANTS NAMES AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

NAME	GRADE	RACE	GENDER

DATE OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW:

TIME ALLOCATION:

1 Introduce the topic of the study in a GENERAL fashion (do not lead participants)

“Good morning everyone and thank you for taking the time to participate in my research study. As you are aware, the main purpose of the research study is to assist me in developing a theory on ‘Manager’s subjective experience of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development’. As managers in our organisation, my test is to ultimately learn and understand your subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process you have recently undergone as part of developing your leadership competencies.”

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

2 Lay the ground rules “to facilitate the process I would like to lay down a few ground rules”

- 2.1 Only one person is to speak at a time.
- 2.2 No side conversations.
- 2.3 Everyone must participate. I want to learn from everyone here- your opinions, views, feelings, perceptions are important to me. I want each person to tell me a story today; your story may sound similar to someone else’s story but tell it anyway! Don’t always just say “I agree”! There is no right or wrong answer and I encourage you to “talk” to each other.
- 2.4 You are responsible for the discussion that is to take place during this session (1,5 hours). My role is as a moderator not an interviewer so I facilitate the discussion not create it. I urge you to ask each other questions and encourage those who are not participating to do so.
- 2.5 You all signed the initial form confirming your participation in this session as well as your agreement to ensure that everything that is discussed in this venue remains confidential and private. Can I confirm that everyone is satisfied with this arrangement
- 2.6 The moderator will take notes.

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

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3 Ice breaker : “We will start off by allowing everyone around the table to briefly introduce themselves. Perhaps you can state your name and position at the organisation.”

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

4 Discussion starter question “As mentioned earlier, the main topic of my theme is your “subjective experience” of 360-degree feedback as a tool in leadership development. To obtain consensus and before moving on with this exercise, it is important that we take a few minutes to define the term ‘subjective experience’”.

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

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“I would be interested in understanding your subjective experience of the 360-degree feedback process as a tool in leadership development/a tool to help you develop your leadership competencies.” *(This is where the moderator allows the discussion topic to flow and picks up a number of follow-up discussion points as part of the narrowing down and focus of the research study.)*

Look for key areas:

- negative reactions
- self image
- overestimation
- positive reactions
- self perceptions

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

5 Introduce first substantive topic (narrow it down to information surrounding the research question and aims of the study)

Use phrases such as “I recall; I would be interested in....; I wonder....; I would like to hear more about that ... hear the following (summarise); Could you elaborate on.....; Please clarify...”.

- Conceptualise leadership development in the organisation

I would be interested in your understanding of leadership/I would like to hear more about what you feel are the key elements in leadership development.

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

- Discuss 360-degree feedback as tool in leadership development

How does it relate to self-awareness/the six leadership competencies?

What is your understanding of 360 feedback? In your opinion how will it contribute to leadership development?

Identify what participants feel are the benefits/disadvantages of 360-degree feedback.

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

- Refer back to subjective experience discussed in the discussion starter question and ask what factors influenced/impacted on the subjective experience (always be open to new elements).

Identify elements linked to:

- demographic differences (gender/race/age/years experience)
- rater bias
- rater credibility and contact
- the relevance of the competencies measured
- the ranking method - the rating method
- the perceived purpose - the actual purpose
- developmental - evaluative
- feedback provider
- discussed with subordinates
- relevance?

EXAMPLE: Could you describe/clarify/elaborate on the factors that impacted on or influenced particular subjective experiences?

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

- It would be interesting to understand how you would use the information provided in your development as leaders of our organisation and how you feel about the utilisation of this information as a tool in your development as potential future leaders.

Determine whether:

- a development plan has been put in place
- performance appraisal objectives exist
- personal development is happening
- there are particular competencies and how many will be focused on

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

6 Conclusion

- Ask participants to state what they think the most important elements of the discussion have been.
- Thank participants for their time. Explain that for validity, respondent validation may be required and participants will be contacted if necessary.
- Ensure confidentiality and offer to send a copy of the completed dissertation should they be interested.
- Any further questions you would like to ask?

Notes

Verbal responses	Nonverbal responses

Guiding factors

- range
- specificity
- depth (identify feelings and meaning)

- personal context (look for particularly important aspects/characteristics of certain participants) Example: Have you grown as a person/ What do you most value about yourself now? Tell me about your views?
- **External reality (FACTS) For example: If you think back on the process/the feedback session/the report is there anything else that really stands out in your mind?**
- **Internal reality (feeling and meaning). For example: Tell me about your thoughts and feelings?/What does that mean to you?/Could you describe the most important learning this process has resulted in for you as an individual?**

General comments on focus group interview

Seating arrangements:

Discussion flow:

Leading comments by moderator:

Dominant participants:

Atmosphere:

General: