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## Adaptive Performance in Small and Medium Enterprises: Effects of Feedback Seeking, Work Uncertainty and Entrepreneurial Intention

Farhan Qadir<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Shahid<sup>2</sup>, Gainiya Tazhina<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lahore Business School, University of Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Lahore Business School, University of Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU), Almaty, Kazakhstan

### Correspondence:

Farhan Qadir: [farhan.qadir@hotmail.com](mailto:farhan.qadir@hotmail.com)

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## **Adaptive Performance in Small and Medium Enterprises: Effects of Feedback Seeking, Work Uncertainty and Entrepreneurial Intention**

*Farhan Qadir, Muhammad Shahid and Gainiya Tazhina\**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The paper examines the relationship between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance with the mediating role of work uncertainty and entrepreneurial intention within the Self-Determination Theory framework. Data were gathered using a three-wave, time-lagged survey design, targeting Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) employees from Pakistan's six major cities (Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta) working in the manufacturing and service industries. Parallel multiple mediation was tested through Structural Equational Modelling (SEM). The study reveals that work uncertainty and entrepreneurial intention act as parallel mediators between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance. By highlighting the role of team members, this research shifts the emphasis from managers to peers in soliciting feedback. These insights offer policymakers a new perspective for designing more effective workforce development strategies. Overall, the findings contribute to the feedback-seeking and adaptive-performance literature by demonstrating how organisations can increase performance by mitigating work uncertainty and fostering entrepreneurial intention.*

**Keywords:** Feedback-Seeking Behaviour, Adaptive Performance, Work Uncertainty, Entrepreneurial Intention, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

**JEL Classification Codes:** D03, D81, D83, D91, J63, L2, L26, M14

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\* *Farhan Qadir* and *Muhammad Shahid* are affiliated with the Lahore Business School, University of Lahore in Pakistan. *Gainiya Tazhina* is affiliated with the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Kazakhstan.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The literature supports that seeking feedback from managers and supervisors plays a vital role in improving employees' adaptive performance and innovativeness in organisational settings (Zhang et al., [2024](#)). Resultantly, this enables organisations to produce groundbreaking products and services to retain their competitive edge in the marketplace. In addition to this, the existing literature on feedback seeking and employee adaptive performance is limited in scope (Déprez et al., [2021](#)). According to a recent study, employees can enhance their adaptive performance by seeking feedback from managers (Rowe et al., [2024](#)); however, the extent to which they benefit from this feedback depends on their individual cognitive capacity (Alam [2021](#)). This point is further reinforced by the recommendation that employees solicit feedback from both vertical (managerial) and horizontal (peer) sources to improve performance (Lee [2022](#)). For instance, soliciting feedback not only from colleagues but also from customers, suppliers, regulatory bodies, and Environmental Protection Agencies (EPAs) etc. can help improve products or services and contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goals (Attanasio et al., [2022](#)).

The deliberate act of analysing and reviewing one's performance in light of input from others with the goal of achieving desired outcomes is known as 'seeking feedback' (London et al., [2023](#)). In the context of adaptive performance, feedback seeking is critical because it allows workers to acquire important information to perform certain activities or tasks. However, existing literature has predominantly focused on the effectiveness of seeking feedback from managers or supervisors in a given organisational structure (Bahtilla [2024](#)); but there has been comparatively less emphasis given on feedback from colleagues or teammates. Soliciting feedback from fellow employees is significant as they may be directly performing the required task themselves (López-Cabarcos et al., [2022](#)). This particular situation places emphasis on an underexplored topic of research, i.e., how seeking feedback from co-workers can influence the intention, creativity, and performance of employees. Building on the notion that co-workers serve as primary sources of feedback within organisations, they are increasingly recognised as key contributors to adaptive performance (Koch and Denner [2022](#)). Accordingly, feedback from teammates should be viewed as both more valuable and cost-effective. Therefore, it is imperative that this research gap be filled through further investigation.

This study also incorporates the concept of 'work uncertainty' defined as the degree to which individuals feel unclear about their job roles and the broader work environment. Despite the passage of time post-COVID19, many domestic and international continue to face the enduring effects of work uncertainty across the globe (Barai and Dhar [2024](#)). Local Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are often significantly impacted by this (Maker [2021](#)). 'Entrepreneurial intention' also plays a vital role in driving individual growth and success (Filgona et al., [2020](#)); and is recognised as a precursor to business

creation (Hassan et al., 2021). It has been observed that employees with entrepreneurial intent are more interested in creating an impact and bringing innovativeness to an organisation (Shahzad et al., [2021](#)). Adaptability is increasingly prioritised for its potential to meet the demands of adaptive performance and its role as a key psychological indicator. Accordingly, this study proposes that entrepreneurial intention serves as a critical psychological mechanism that mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance.

To theoretically ground the research, the study draws on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals who satisfy their basic psychological needs experience enhanced motivation, ultimately leading to improved outcomes. The study proposes that seeking feedback can help fulfil employees' psychological needs, thereby strengthening their motivation to pursue leadership roles or self-employment. This motivation acts as a self-determined mechanism through which employees can attain higher levels of autonomous and adaptive performance (Zhang et al., [2024](#)).

### **1.1. Study Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between feedback seeking (FBS) and an employee's adaptive performance (AP) with the mediating role of work uncertainty (WU) and entrepreneurial intention (EI) considering the theoretical framework of SDT. In addition to this, this research expands the existing body of literature on the direct or indirect relationship between FBS (independent variable) and AP (dependent variable) by highlighting how entrepreneurial intention and work uncertainty (both mediators) influence this dynamic. Specifically, it suggests that employees who possess entrepreneurial intention and experience work uncertainty are more likely to exhibit higher levels of adaptive performance. Furthermore, the study offers both managers and employees new perspectives that can be applied in real-world settings. Finally, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the studied variables by contextualising them within Pakistan's unique socioeconomic conditions.

### **1.2. Significance of Study**

This study makes three major contributions to the existing body of literature concerned. Firstly, this research uses the SDT framework to conceptualise the relationship between feedback seeking, work uncertainty, and entrepreneurial intention on adaptive performance. Secondly, it examines the relationship between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance, particularly when feedback includes constructive input from colleagues. To address the importance of diverse feedback sources, the study specifically investigates the impact of soliciting feedback from team members on adaptive performance. Thirdly, shifting the focus from managers to team members may meaningfully enrich the existing literature on feedback gathering. Given their closer day-

to-day interactions, team members often have a deeper understanding of one another's strengths and weaknesses, making them well-positioned to provide more targeted and effective feedback to enhance performance.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to the theory of self-determination or SDT, people have an inborn desire to reach their greatest potential (Ryan et al., [2021](#)), based on three primary psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Tang et al., [2020](#)). The term 'relatedness' describes the need to have a sense of affection, belonging, and purpose in the larger social environment (Capon-Sieber et al., [2022](#)), whereas 'competence' is the ability to do something well or effectively (Sulaiman and Ismail [2020](#)). Lastly, 'autonomy' comes from the Greek word '*auto-nomos*' (meaning 'self-rule') and refers to the right of an individual to be self-ruled or self-governed. When someone wants autonomy, s/he wants to be free to make choices without consulting a higher authority. This leads to the conclusion that self-determination and soliciting feedback may increase an employee's EI and enhance their AP. Hence, it is important to look at how WU and EI mediate the relationship between FBS and AP (responsiveness of an employee to adjust quickly in an evolving work environment).

A study conducted by Déprez et al. ([2021](#)) discovered a noteworthy correlation between the act of requesting feedback and the ability to adapt and perform well. Another study claimed that FBS behaviour is higher with AP (Johnson et al., [2023](#)). The SDT confirms that individuals act in accordance with their inherent motivation. It further endorses that there is a strong connection between an employee's performance, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. This means that competence, autonomy, and relatedness motivate individuals to change their behaviour based on the needs of the environment. They do this by seeking feedback from their team members. Thus, the subsequent correlation is hypothesised:

***Hypothesis 1: Feedback seeking is positively related to adaptive performance.***

Another study also claims that feedback-seeking behaviour is negatively significant with work uncertainty (Woo et al., [2023](#)). Given the limited occurrence of unsolicited feedback in many workplaces, individuals can significantly benefit by actively seeking input. It can reduce the likelihood of ambiguity or confusion in the workplace. Hence, the act of actively seeking feedback is inversely correlated with the level of ambiguity in one's work.

***Hypothesis 2: Feedback seeking is negatively related to work uncertainty.***

Employee EI is the urge to acquire new information or insights that inspire creativity and innovation in one's job. Whenever they recognise a learning opportunity, individuals who possess a high level of EI actively engage in risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness. Such employees tend to be more motivated, value personal development, and exhibit

greater creativity (Aldabbas et al., [2025](#)). It is important for individuals to possess EI in order to foster AP. As a result, it can be asserted that requesting feedback increases EI.

***Hypothesis 3: Feedback seeking is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.***

Intention is significantly influenced by feedback. Undoubtedly, individuals can identify areas for skill development and gain insights about prevailing behavioural standards within the team by actively pursuing feedback. The relationship between FBS behaviour and EI has been explored in a number of studies. Notably, some findings suggest that individuals who seek feedback more frequently tend to demonstrate higher levels of goal attainment and learning compared to those who do so less often. In the post-Pandemic period, rising societal and economic pressures have intensified global business challenges, placing work uncertainty at the forefront and contributing to increased job-related stress (Maker [2021](#)). Seeking feedback can help mitigate this uncertainty, as access to timely knowledge and information enhances adaptive performance and reduces perceived job ambiguity.

***Hypothesis 4: Work uncertainty mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance.***

The relationship between EI, FBS, and AP is intricate and vital in dynamic work environments. Employees with an EI are more innovative, adaptive, flexible and welcome new changes in the work environment. Now, EI adds value when such employees solicit feedback in order to absorb changes in work practices. By soliciting feedback, staff members can pinpoint their strengths or weaknesses. Input from fellow team members allows them to adapt their methods and actions accordingly (Alnuaimi et al., [2021](#)). In this context, it is important to discuss the effect of FBS on an employee's AP through the mediation of the EI. Those employees, who possess a strong EI, are better able to utilise criticism in a positive way, which encourages innovation, creativity, adaptability, and continued improvement (Alhadabi and Karpinski [2020](#)). Instituting an entrepreneurial culture that encourages soliciting input among employees cultivates adaptable performance, which is key to success in today's rapidly changing business landscape.

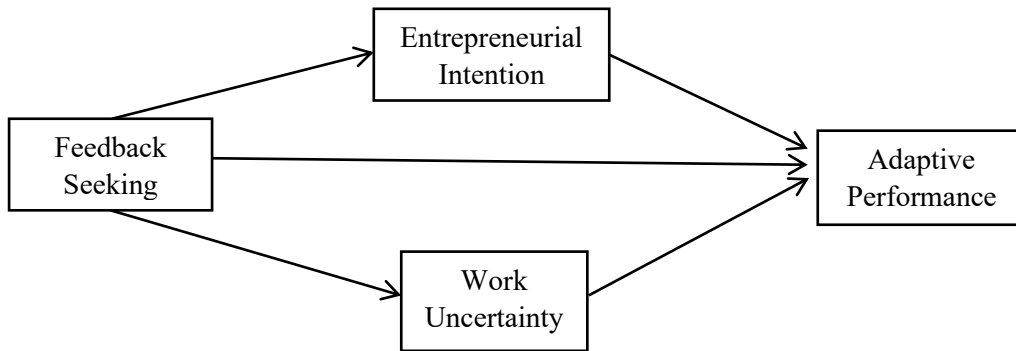
***Hypothesis 5: Employees' entrepreneurial intention mediates the relationship between feedback seeking and adaptive performance.***

FBS acts as a technique that helps to decrease WU among employees. Furthermore, it also helps to develop employees' adaptive capabilities to achieve organisational goals. Employees with EI are predisposed to dealing with WU. They consider failure as a learning opportunity and actively seek innovative solutions to organisational problems (He et al., [2023](#)). When employees are positively engaged in FBS, they are likely to interpret this input constructively and use it to fuel creativity and experimentation (Rane et al., [2023](#)). In addition to this, WU and EI influence employees' reactions positively when soliciting feedback for improvement (He et al., [2023](#)). Organisations that promote an entrepreneurial

culture and provide support to their employees empower them to navigate WU, thrive amidst complexity, and drive sustained performance excellence (Lee and Kim 2021). This is because employees who feel in control of their actions are more likely to perform well. It is, therefore, hypothesised that EI may play a role in moderating the relationship between the process of FBS and level of engagement exhibited by employees (Rane et al., 2023). Consequently, based on theoretical assumptions and prior research, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

***Work uncertainty and entrepreneurial intention function as parallel mediators, simultaneously mediating the relationship between feedback seeking and employees' adaptive performance.***

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**



**Source:** Authors' own.

Note: Theoretical Model (based on SDT): FBS → AP; FBS → EI → AP; FBS → WU → AP; Where: FBS = Feedback Seeking; AP = Adaptive Performance; EI = Entrepreneurial Intention (Mediator); WU = Work Uncertainty (Mediator)

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Participants**

Employees working in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) of manufacturing and service sectors in six cities of Pakistan were surveyed online from Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta. Out of 490 questionnaires attempted, only 314 (or 64%) were completely filled out by 186 male respondents (59.24%) and 128 female respondents (40.76%). 85% had a full-time job and the majority of respondents (73%) were in their 30s and 40s. On average, respondents had been with their SME for two to three years. The majority (79%) held a degree equivalent to 16 years of education.

### 3.2. Measures

A five-item scale developed by VandeWalle et al. (2000) was used to measure FBS, including sample items such as: *Employees were told to assess their overall job performance*. Employee perceptions of WU were assessed using a nine-item scale by Leach et al. (2013), with items like: *Does the equipment you use work reliably?* AP was measured using an eight-item scale from Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2015), including items such as: *I use creative ideas to manage incoming events*. Lastly, EI was measured with a 6-item scale by Liñán and Chen (2009), including: *I'm ready to make anything to be an entrepreneur*. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### 3.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The factorial validity of the measures was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Model fit indices (see Table 1) indicated that the proposed four-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df = 2.71$ , RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05, Tucker-Lewis Index [TLI] = 0.90, Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = 0.91). In comparison, a three-factor model, combining FBS and AP, showed a weaker fit ( $\chi^2/df = 3.92$ , RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.08, TLI = 0.78, CFI = 0.80). A two-factor model, grouping FBS, EI, and AP into a single factor, also demonstrated poor fit ( $\chi^2/df = 5.15$ , RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.10, TLI = 0.69, CFI = 0.71). The one-factor model, in which all variables were loaded onto a single latent construct, showed the poorest fit ( $\chi^2/df = 6.91$ , RMSEA = 0.14, SRMR = 0.12, TLI = 0.55, CFI = 0.59). These results supported the discriminant validity of FBS, WU, EI, and AP as distinct constructs.

**Table 1: Measurement Model**

No.	Measurement Model	$\chi^2$	Df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
1	Four-Factor Model	933.15	344		0.07	0.05	0.90	0.91
2	Three-Factor Model	1160.79	296	416.33**	0.10	0.08	0.78	0.80
3	Two-Factor Model	1533.41	298	788.95**	0.12	0.10	0.69	0.71
4	Single Factor Model	2067.33	299	1322.87**	0.14	0.12	0.55	0.59

**Note:** RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index. In model 2, FBS and AP were merged; in model 3 FBS, AP and EI were merged.

**Source:** Authors' own.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics as well as relationship among the research variables. AP (M = 4.37, SD = 0.76) and FBS (M = 3.96, SD = 0.88) were positively correlated with one another according to the statistics. In contrast, WU (M = 1.55, SD = 0.68) was negatively correlated. In addition, Table 2 shows a positive correlation between AP, FBS and EI, as well as a negative correlation with WU; these results provided the first statistical basis for testing the study's hypotheses using AMOS-22.

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation and Reliability**

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	0.68	0.47								
Age	2.24	1.10	0.10							
Education	2.28	1.03	-0.33**	-0.08						
Experience	1.59	0.86	0.10	0.64**	-0.25**					
Work Uncertainty (WU)	1.55	0.68	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.05	(0.89)			
Feedback Seeking (FBS)	3.96	0.88	0.02	0.11	0.02	0.14*	-0.31**	(.85)		
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	4.10	0.79	0.01	-0.04	0.06	0.01	-0.28**	0.27**	(0.82)	
Adaptive Performance (AP)	4.37	0.76	0.01	0.05	-0.01	0.10	-0.58**	0.45**	0.31**	(0.91)

*Notes:* \*\*P < 0.01; Reliability is presented in parenthesis.

*Source:* Authors' own.

**Table 3: SEM-Direct Effect**

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Path	Path Coefficient	SE	C.R.	p-Value
H1	FBS -> AP	0.22	0.06	5.03	0.000
H2	FBS -> WU	-0.24	0.08	-4.96	0.000
H3	FBS -> EI	0.25	0.07	4.88	0.000

*Source:* Authors' own.

Using AMOS to conduct the bootstrapping procedure, the analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between employees' AP and their FBS behaviour ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as shown in Table 3. The results provided support for Hypothesis 1. Additionally, as shown in Table 4, there was a negative and significant link between requesting feedback and job uncertainty ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, hypothesis 3 was also shown to be significant since there was a strong positive correlation between requesting feedback and EI ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 4: Bias-Corrected Bootstrapping Results for Multiple Mediation Model**

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Path	Indirect Estimate	SE	LLCI	ULCI	p-Value
H4	FBS -> WU -> AP	0.13	0.04	0.06	0.24	0.000
H5	FBS -> EI -> AP	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.12	0.001

*Source:* Authors' own.

The study utilised a 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval, based on 10,000 bootstrap samples, to evaluate the multiple mediation model and the significance of conditional indirect effects. AMOS 22 was used to test the hypotheses. The results of the bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs) are presented in Table 4. These CIs were found to be larger than zero, which enabled specific examination of the indirect consequences. The results study indicate that WU has a role in the mediation of AP and FBS (estimate = 0.13; confidence interval = 0.06 and 0.24). Hence, hypothesis 4 is correct. Support for the parallel mediation testing of Hypothesis 6, as presented in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 2, is grounded in the multiple mediation analysis results of Hypotheses 4 and 5.

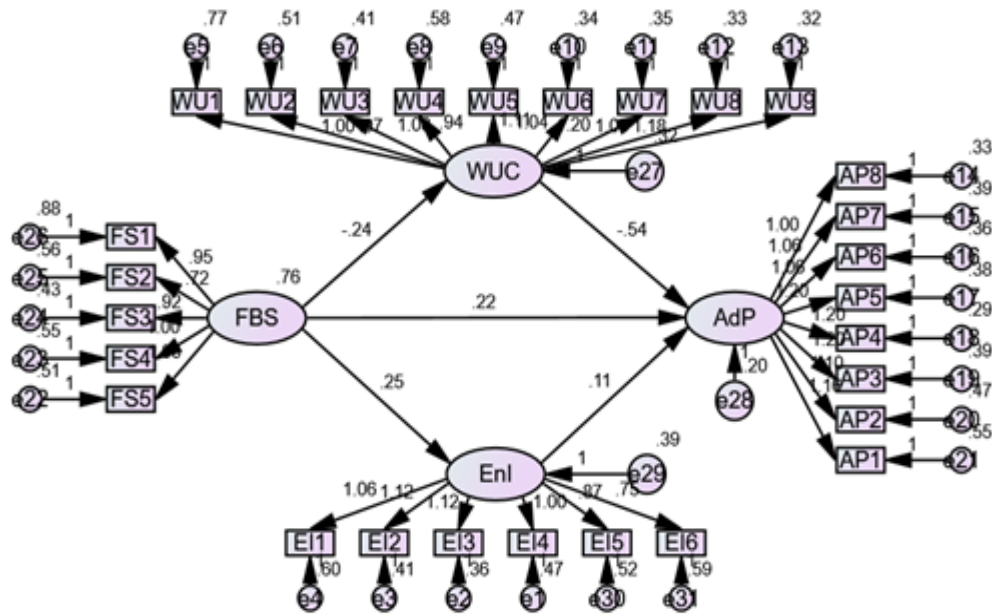
**Table 5: Indirect Effect of FBS on AP via EI and WU: Parallel Mediation Results**

Path Coefficient	SE	LLCI	ULCI	p-Value
0.16	0.05	0.09	0.27	0.000

*Source:* Authors' own.

In order to assess the parallel multiple mediator integrated model developed for this study, the findings draw on point estimates of the differences in the specific indirect effects of the two mediators (refer to Table 5).

Figure 2: Structural Model



Source: Authors' own.

The two parallel mediators, WU and EI, showed statistically significant indirect effects, as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero [0.09, 0.27]. This indicates that FBS indirectly influenced AP through both WU and EI. Therefore, WU and EI were confirmed as significant mediators in the relationship between FBS and AP, supporting Hypothesis 6.

## 5. DISCUSSION

These findings are in line with earlier research (Sherf and Morrison 2020; Lee and Kim 2021; Irfan et al., 2023). For instance, Sailer et al. (2023) found that FBS positively influenced AP, as it provided relevant motivation to employees in SMEs and helped them incorporate adaptive behaviour into their routine tasks. Similarly, FBS played a key role in enhancing motivation, inspiration, and recognition among employees with EI, supporting their commitment to high performance. In addition, these findings lend support to previous research suggesting that AP improves when supported by effective strategies, whether through reduced job uncertainty or a strong entrepreneurial orientation (Treviso et al., 2023). The findings also advance prior research on the impact of FBS on AP (Zhan et al., 2023). In summary, the study's results, along with prior findings, confirm that FBS plays a key role in achieving AP through the mediating effects of WU and EI. One of the primary objectives of this research was to investigate how WU and EI mediate the relationship

between FBS and AP within the SME sector. The findings revealed that both WU and EI partially mediated this relationship.

Some limitations were observed in this research which may be used to open up new pathways for future research directions. To begin with, information for this study came from SMEs of Pakistan. Hence, it is important to use caution when applying these findings to other countries since cultural variations were not considered during the research. To determine if the results are culture-specific, more in-depth research must be conducted. SMEs have very distinct features; hence, results cannot be applied to other (possibly larger) businesses. In addition to this, the present study did not examine how characteristics like gender, experience, and age, influence the correlation between FBS and AP.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research offers a fresh perspective on adaptive performance in the SME sector. Grounded in self-determination theory (SDT), the study examined how work uncertainty (WU) and entrepreneurial intention (EI) mediates the relationship between feedback seeking (FBS) and adaptive performance (AP) within Pakistan's SMEs. The findings fill a gap in the literature by applying a theoretical model to investigate both the direct and indirect relationships in this context where previous studies tended to focus on one or the other. By incorporating SDT to examine the relationships among FBS, WU, EI, and AP, this study contributed to the growing body of research on feedback seeking. The findings showed that FBS had a positive and statistically significant effect on AP in SMEs, and that FBS directly and substantially reduced WU. Furthermore, FBS positively influenced EI. The results also indicated that WU played an important mediating role in the relationship between FBS and AP. Similarly, EI served as a significant mediator in this relationship. Finally, WU and EI jointly demonstrated a significant parallel mediation effect, highlighting their combined importance in explaining how FBS contributes to AP.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in economic development. The findings of this study can aid decision-makers in developing better policies to promote feedback-seeking (FBS) behaviour in employees not only from managers but also from peers. This research not only validates that feedback seeking is an effective method for strengthening adaptive performance (AP) directly and indirectly but also contributes to SME managerial practices by confirming that FBS can enhance entrepreneurial intention (EI) while reducing work uncertainty (WU). Therefore, SME administrators can enhance AP by ensuring that its key antecedents are effectively addressed. In addition, management should take note of the study's findings since they have a direct impact on employee creativity, performance, and progress. It is the responsibility of forward-thinking leadership to promote the principles of AP throughout their organisations. When leaders inspire, motivate, and express appreciation to their staff, it encourages them to seek feedback and become more engaged in AP. If SMEs aim to improve their performance, they should

recruit individuals who value EI and are open to input from their teammates. Since managers influence the relationship between FBS and AP, they should give due attention to EI and take concrete steps to reduce job instability. For this reason, AP in the SME sector ought to be prioritised as a top agenda.

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