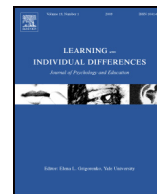




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Learning and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lindif

Learning goal orientation buffers the effects of negative normative feedback on test self-efficacy and reattempt interest

Jason J. Dahling*, Christopher L. Ruppel

The College of New Jersey, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 July 2015

Received in revised form 20 July 2016

Accepted 12 August 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Social cognitive theory

Goal orientation

Performance feedback

Self-efficacy

ABSTRACT

Why do students differ in how they respond to negative feedback after performing poorly on an ability test? We conducted an experiment in which participants received bogus positive or negative normative feedback on a fake cognitive ability test. Consistent with social cognitive theory, participants who received negative feedback reported lower self-efficacy and interest in reattempting the test to earn a higher score. However, people with a high learning goal orientation, who value learning and mastery, were protected from the effects of negative feedback. Specifically, the effect of negative normative performance feedback on test reattempt self-efficacy and interest was significant and detrimental only when learning goal orientation was low. These results point to the importance of developing learning goal orientations to improve students' capacity to respond constructively to performance failures and negative feedback.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Receiving feedback about our actions is a ubiquitous part of life (Carver & Scheier, 1998) that contributes to learning, motivation, and self-awareness (e.g., Butler & Nisan, 1986; Goodman & Wood, 2004; Krenn, Wurth, & Hergovich, 2013; Narciss, 2004; Wulf, Shea, & Lewthwaite, 2010). People readily accept positive feedback because it is self-affirming and boosts both self-esteem and confidence (Sedikides & Green, 2009). In contrast, negative feedback is harder to accept because it is self-threatening, and consequently it is frequently resisted or ignored by those who most need it (Audia & Locke, 2003). However, learning from this type of feedback helps people take corrective action that contributes to their personal growth and improvement (Kappes, Oettingen, & Pak, 2012). Consequently, people who act on negative feedback constructively are likely to experience more success in life than those who do not.

In this study, we test a model grounded in social cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) and goal orientation theory (Dweck, 1986) to better understand how individual differences shape reactions to feedback. Using an experimental design, we examine the effects of bogus normative feedback on self-efficacy judgements and interest in persevering in an ability test performance domain. We show that learning goal orientation, an individual difference that concerns a desire to master performance domains and learn from failure, serves as an important

moderator that buffers people's unfavorable reaction to negative feedback.

Our research in this area replicates and extends previous scholarship that documents the importance of feedback sign, self-efficacy, and goal orientation to understanding reactions to performance feedback. Early feedback research observed that people are reluctant to accept negative feedback (e.g., Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Podsakoff & Farh, 1989), and related scholarship documents that the detrimental effects of negative feedback are oftentimes explained by self-efficacy (Baron, 1988; Beckmann, Beckmann, & Elliott, 2009; Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). Further, several studies have examined how goal orientation qualifies reactions to negative feedback (e.g., Brett & Atwater, 2001; Cron, Slocum, VandeWalle, & Fu, 2005; VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001). In this study, we replicate some of these key findings and elaborate on them by providing a test of how feedback sign interacts with goal orientation to predict self-efficacy levels. No research to date has examined this interaction, nor has previous research examined these variables in the context of an academic testing environment where students must decide whether or not to persist with a failed test. Thus, we offer a more nuanced theoretical exploration of reactions to negative feedback, and we do so with an experimental design that offers strong internal validity and relevance to academic testing contexts. Although this contribution to the feedback literature is incremental, it is nevertheless valuable because various types of negative feedback, such as test grades in school, are given to people in everyday life regardless of their tendency to voluntarily seek feedback. The fact that everyone endures failure and criticism at one point or another makes this research on reactions to unsolicited negative feedback practically relevant.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, The College of New Jersey, 2000 Pennington Rd, Ewing, NJ 08628, United States.
E-mail address: dahling@tcnj.edu (J.J. Dahling).

1.1. Social cognitive theory and the effects of negative feedback on self-efficacy

SCT is one of the most influential theories of motivation in psychology (Latham, 2013). SCT emphasizes the role of human agency in understanding behavior (Bandura, 1989, 2000), and it posits that learning experiences, environmental variables, and individual processes have a triadic reciprocal relationship that shape personal outcomes (Bandura, 1986, 1989). In particular, the theory emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, an individual difference that involves belief that one can exercise control over events in a particular domain. Self-efficacy is domain-specific, meaning that self-efficacy may be high for one performance domain (e.g., technical writing) and low for another domain (e.g., public speaking; Bandura, 2012).

Importantly, self-efficacy is shaped by environmental learning experiences, some of which occur in the form of direct feedback. Feedback is a form of *verbal or social persuasion*, one of the core learning experiences that Bandura (1986) identified as antecedents of self-efficacy. To this end, feedback about poor performance in a domain can lower self-efficacy in that domain, at least in the short term until people receive environmental cues that suggest improvement and restore confidence and agency over the performance domain (Baron, 1988; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Ilgen & Davis, 2000). Critically, when self-efficacy is low, SCT posits that people are likely to exhibit lower performance and disengagement from the domain because they have no reason to expect that their efforts will be successful (Bandura, 2012; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; VandeWalle et al., 2001).

SCT therefore implies that the effect of negative feedback on engagement in a performance domain is mediated by self-efficacy. Negative feedback serves as a learning experience that lowers self-efficacy by suggesting that people lack agency over the performance domain in question. Subsequently, lower self-efficacy should predict outcomes such as poor performance, low interest, and disengagement from the performance domain in question in favor of reallocating effort to other domains where expectations of success are higher (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 2012; Chen & Usher, 2013; Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). However, some individual differences may qualify the impact of negative feedback on self-efficacy judgments, particularly learning goal orientation.

1.2. Negative feedback and goal orientation

Goal orientation is an individual difference that shapes reactions to the progress made toward goals and standards (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). It is related to, but distinct from, other personality traits such as the Big Five (Wang & Erdheim, 2007). According to goal orientation theory, people with a particular type of goal orientation called a *learning goal orientation* (also known as a mastery goal orientation; Elliot & McGregor, 2001) are primarily concerned with learning the actual processes associated with tasks and mastering domains (Zweig & Webster, 2007), and they generally persist in their pursuit of mastery when confronted with early failure feedback (Dweck, 1986; VandeWalle, 2003). Although goal orientation is sometimes operationalized as a momentary, state-like variable (e.g., Beck & Schmidt, 2013), our focus in this study is on stable, person-level differences in goal orientation. As an individual difference, goal orientation is described as a *quasi-trait* (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005), meaning that is reasonably stable over moderate periods, but may gradually shift over longer periods. Thus, person-level goal orientations are malleable given strong, consistent experiences with feedback and goal pursuit in important domains.

Learning goal orientation is correlated with particular implicit theories about personal attributes (Dweck, 1999). Specifically, learning goal orientation is related to an incremental person theory, which involves a belief that attributes are malleable and that people can change. Accordingly, people with a high learning goal orientation believe that improvement and development are possible for anyone through effort and persistence. People who are learning goal oriented are therefore more

likely to persist with a task after failure because they support the notion that they will improve and become more successful at the task in the future if they increase their effort (Dweck, 1999).

Goal orientation also influences how people view the purpose of feedback. Individuals who are learning goal oriented tend to view feedback as useful because it provides them with information about how they can correct past mistakes in order to become more competent at mastering the task (Farr, Hofmann, & Ringenbach, 1993). Learning goal orientation also predicts response patterns when individuals face task difficulty or task failure (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This aspect of goal orientation is especially relevant to the current study. Within learning goal orientation, individuals tend to practice an adaptive response pattern, in which they boost effort, seek situation-specific solutions, engage self-confidence, and enjoy the challenge when faced with situations of failure (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). We therefore submit that learning goal orientation in particular serves an important buffering function in the face of negative feedback, and that the deleterious effect of negative feedback on self-efficacy and interest in continuing efforts in a performance domain is weaker for people who have high learning goal orientation. For these individuals, negative feedback is appraised positively as a challenge and growth opportunity rather than a threat to their agency.

1.3. The present study

We tested our model, illustrated in Fig. 1, with an experimental design conducted with college students. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either a negative or positive normative feedback report concerning a bogus test of cognitive ability, described in detail below. We opted to provide normative feedback (i.e., a percentile rank relative to a norm group) in this study given that this is the way that feedback is presented on major standardized ability tests that students must face, such as the SAT or ACT exams. We then inquired about their self-efficacy for improving their score and their interest in reattempting the test to earn a higher score. We focused on reattempt interest as a dependent variable to assess participants' continued engagement with performance on the bogus test.

Consistent with social cognitive theory, we expected that participants who received negative feedback would have lower interest in reattempting the test, and that this effect would be a function of lowered domain-specific self-efficacy in the wake of failure feedback. However, this effect should be conditional on individual differences in learning goal orientation: for people who view failure as an opportunity to learn and gain future mastery over a task domain, negative feedback should not act as a deterrent to further engagement with the task. Thus, as shown in Fig. 1, our model implies a pattern of moderated mediation. Our specific hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1. The effect of the negative feedback manipulation on test reattempt self-efficacy will be moderated by learning goal orientation,

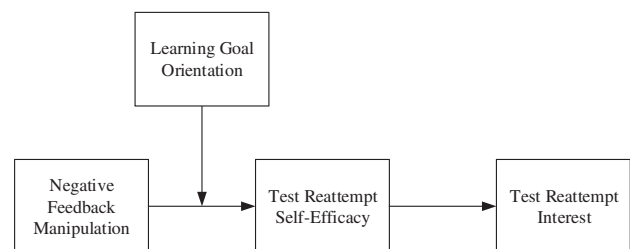


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model of the conditional indirect effect of negative performance feedback on interest in reattempting a failed test.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6844659>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6844659>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)