

The Effects of Goal Orientation and Psychological Safety on Feedback Seeking, Changes in Performance, and Learning in Student Internships.

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Abstract

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Industrial and organizational psychology research has focused on improving employee performance. A large body of research has examined the seemingly critical relevance of goal orientations in predicting individual performance, however, the findings from this literature remain equivocal. An important aspect of performance is the acquiring of knowledge, or learning the skills needed to perform. Internships provide a context for students to learn or develop the skills needed for their future careers, and can therefore, provide an interesting context to study knowledge development and performance. Drawing from this, the goal of the present study was to assess the impact of goal orientation through feedback seeking on change in performance and learning in an internship context, and the role of psychological safety as a contextual boundary condition. University students and their supervisors were surveyed at several timepoints throughout their program internship. Students' learning goal orientation was shown to have a positive effect on their learning through their feedback seeking, while their performance avoid goal orientation had a detrimental effect on their change in performance throughout their internship. It is concluded that in order for students to benefit from their learning experiences in an internship context, learning goal oriented behaviour should be encouraged, and performance avoid goal oriented behaviour should discouraged. Further practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: goal orientation, feedback seeking, learning, performance, internship

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Review of the Literature, Theory and Hypotheses	3
<i>Goal Orientation</i>	3
<i>Literature Review and Hypotheses Development</i>	4
<i>The Mediating Role of Feedback Seeking</i>	8
<i>The Moderating Role of Psychological Safety</i>	12
Method.....	16
<i>Sample and Procedure</i>	16
<i>Measures</i>	17
Results.....	19
<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	19
<i>Hypothesis Testing</i>	19
Discussion.....	25
<i>Theoretical Implications</i>	26
<i>Practical Implications</i>	27
<i>Limitations, and Future Directions</i>	28
<i>Conclusion</i>	29
References.....	30

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. <i>Proposed research model</i>	15
Table 1. <i>Descriptive and correlation analysis</i>	19
Table 2. <i>Regressions on Change in Performance</i>	20
Table 3. <i>Regressions on Learning</i>	21
Table 4. <i>Mediating effect of feedback seeking on change in performance (controls included)</i> ...	22
Table 5. <i>Mediating effect of feedback seeking on learning (controls included)</i>	23

The Effects of Goal Orientation and Psychological Safety on Feedback Seeking, Changes in Performance, and Learning in Student Internships.

Introduction

A large focus of industrial and organizational psychology research focuses on improving the individual performance of employees (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015; Denisi & Sonesh, 2011). Goal orientation has been one of the many individual factors that has been studied extensively in understanding predictors of individual performance since it relates to the ways in which individuals respond to challenges and view their abilities by either (a) focusing and persisting on a task, (b) demonstrating their competence, or (c) avoiding appearing inept (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Individuals with a learning goal orientation have a growth mindset and believe their abilities are malleable and are therefore motivated to develop their abilities. Individuals with a performance prove and avoid orientation on the other hand have a fixed mindset, meaning they believe their abilities are set. This leads these individuals to either be motivated to demonstrate their abilities (performance prove goal orientation) or to avoid situations in which their shortcomings may become apparent (performance avoid goal orientation; Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). Since goal orientations involve the cognitive frameworks related to abilities and control of skill acquisition, we would expect them to be linked to performance. However, the overall findings of the effects of goal orientation on performance have been equivocal, with some studies demonstrating a positive relation between learning goal orientations and performance (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004; Vandewalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999), while others have found no relationship between the two (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). There have been similar discrepant findings in the literature when assessing the relation between performance prove goal orientation and performance (Payne et al., 2007; Van Yperen, Blaga, & Postmes, 2014). Lastly, while fewer studies have assessed the relation between performance avoid goal orientation and performance, studies have shown them to be negatively related (Payne et al., 2007; Van Yperen et al., 2014). Albeit the extant literature on goal orientations, and their seemingly critical relevance in organizations, the mixed literature demonstrates that further research is needed to better understand their roles (Vandewalle, Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2019).

An important component of performance is the acquiring of knowledge, or learning the skills needed to perform well (Hollingshead, 1998). Internships are a context in which students

learn or develop the skills needed for their future careers, beyond what can be taught in a classroom (Binder, Bagulay, Cook, & Miller, 2015; Garavan and Murphy, 2001). Student internships in the present study were part of a cooperative education program in which students alternate between their coursework and full-time work throughout their university degree as part of the requirements for their degree (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). These internship placements provide students with real-life work experiences and realistic job previews and help them to develop “an accurate self-concept” (Callanan & Benzing, 2004, p.83; Sobral & Islam, 2015). Internships provide students the experience to apply their theoretical knowledge from the classroom to practical job-related knowledge and skills (Maertz, Stoeberl, & Marks, 2014; Vélez & Giner, 2015). For example, students learn to develop interpersonal and leadership skills, as well as the competencies surrounding working with others (Bennett, Eagle, Mousley, & Ali-Choudhury, 2008). In applying their theoretical knowledge in the workplace, students can better understand these theories thereby helping them perform in the workplace (Maertz, Stoeberl, & Marks, 2014). Internships can therefore be seen as an environment in which educational and workplace contexts are combined. A parallel can be made with the goal orientation research as it was rooted in educational psychology (Dweck, 1986), and was integrated into organizational psychology by Kanfer (1990). Internships are thus an interesting context to study goal orientations, as it allows one to assess both performance and learning in a student population, as they experience their early organizational experiences.

Given the setting of the present study, it is important to distinguish between performance and learning. Job performance can be defined as a behaviour or action that is required by one’s job description that can be appraised and rewarded, that in turn contributes to an organization’s goal (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Rotundo & Rotman, 2002). This can be extended into the academic context through the behaviours and actions appraised as performing well on academic assessments (for example, assignments or scores on exams). While an individual may be rated as performing well throughout their internship, this does not necessarily mean they are learning. Learning, in an academic or workplace context, can be defined as the process and endurance of changes in an individual’s knowledge or skills (Knobbout & Van Der Stappen, 2020). The present paper will therefore incorporate both these outcomes to help contribute to our understanding of the impacts of goal orientations.

In addition to (and possibly contributing to) the mixed outcomes of goal orientations, recent critiques of goal orientation research have outlined the scarcity of longitudinal, field studies assessing the impacts of goal orientation in the workplace (Bråten & Strømsø, 2004; Vandewalle et al., 2019). The present study aims to address these gaps in the literature and add further theoretical contributions and implications to the goal orientation literature. First, a longitudinal methodology allowing for the assessment of changes in performance rather than just performance was adopted. Given that goal orientations' impact how one views one's abilities and faces challenges, assessing a change in performance, rather than performance at one time may allow for better predictions and explanations of the role goal orientation. Second, given the variance seen in goal orientations' impacts on various outcome measures, the process by which, and conditions under which goal orientation can impact changes in performance and learning were assessed. Specifically, feedback seeking is proposed as a mediator, and psychological safety is introduced as a contextual moderator which could impact the conditions under which goal orientations impact feedback seeking, and thereby predicting performance and learning (Vandewalle et al., 2019). Lastly, the context under which the present study takes place provided an interesting analysis as it allows for the bridging of the educational roots of goal orientation theory and the management literature.

Review of the Literature, Theory and Hypotheses

Goal Orientation.

Goal orientation refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can change and grow their abilities (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Based on these underlying beliefs about their ability, individuals will adopt different goal orientations. Individuals with a growth mindset believe they have the potential to cultivate their ability, and as such, are motivated to improve upon their abilities. Contrastingly, individuals with a fixed mindset believe that one's abilities are set in stone, and as such, are constantly motivated to prove themselves, or avoid situations in which they may fail. Goal orientations are seen as quasi-traits (i.e. they can be both a state and trait, with the potential for individuals to employ different goal orientations) that form an individual's cognitive framework of how they interpret and respond across situations of goal achievement, and impact how individuals perceive failures or setbacks (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999; Chen & Mathieu, 2008; Molden & Dweck, 2006; Payne et al., 2007).

From this mindset perspective, the theory of goal orientation emerged and has been linked to the ways in which individuals learn (Vandewalle et al., 2019). Goal orientations can be derived from an individual's growth and fixed mindset and are related to individuals holding learning or performance goals respectively (Vandewalle et al., 2019). Individuals with learning goal orientations focus on developing their abilities whereas those with performance goal orientations focus on seeking acceptance and validation for their abilities (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999; Dweck & Elliot, 1983, as cited in Vandewalle et al., 2019). Performance goal orientation has been further divided into two dimensions: performance prove and performance avoid (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999).

Individuals with learning goal orientations seek to improve their abilities leading to a "mastery oriented" framework in which they seek challenging tasks and persist when faced with difficulties in achieving a goal (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). If failure occurs, these individuals use it as a learning experience, to understand both their current level of abilities and how to improve (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Molden & Dweck, 2006). As such, a learning goal orientation has been positively related to adaptive strategies (Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997) and a higher internal locus of control (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). Individuals with performance orientations, on the other hand, do not believe their abilities are malleable. They will therefore react to failures and setbacks in a negative manner believing it is a reflection of themselves and cannot be improved upon, focusing on the appearance of their abilities or lack thereof (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999; Dweck, 2000). This mindset of fixed abilities will also be related to a lack of control, which in turn leads to a "helplessness response" framework (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Individuals with a performance prove goal orientation believe increased effort is associated with lower abilities leading such individuals to want to prove their abilities to others rather than exerting effort to improve upon their abilities (Brett & Vandewalle, 1999). Performance avoid goal oriented individuals are focused on avoiding negative feedback by exhibiting defensive behaviour under situations where they feel they may face negative feedback (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development.

Within an organizational context, goal orientations have often been examined in relation to task and job performance, creativity, individual and team learning, role, organization, and

social learning, as well as feedback (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015; Beenen, 2014; Hirst, Van Knippenberg, & Zhou, 2009; Huang & Luthans, 2015; Payne et al., 2007; Tan, Au, Cooper-Thomas, & Aw, 2016; Vandewalle et al., 2019; Van Yperen, Blaga, & Postmes, 2014). The association between goal orientation and performance can be, in part, explained by the behaviours exhibited by individuals with different goal orientations in both academic and organizational settings.

Within the workplace, individuals with a learning goal orientation have been found to attain greater performance, while there is a negative relationship between performance goal orientation and performance attainment (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). In a similar vein, Gong et al., (2009) conducted a longitudinal field study to assess the impacts of goal orientations on employee performance and found that learning goal orientation positively predicted managers' ratings of employee performance. In their meta-analysis assessing goal orientation, Payne et al. (2007) found that although learning goal orientation and performance prove goal orientation were both positively related to job performance, these relations were not statistically significant. None of the studies in the meta-analysis examined the relationship between performance avoid goal orientation and job performance (Payne et al., 2007). Similar results were found in a meta-analysis assessing the impact of achievement orientations on job performance (Van Yperenet al., 2014). Achievement orientations is a measure that comprises an individual's goal orientations, such that it represents the mental representations of goal setting (Van Yperen et al., 2014). It was concluded that both mastery-approach (i.e. learning goal orientation) goals, and performance-approach (i.e. performance prove goal orientation) goals had a statistically significant positive relation to performance, whereas performance avoidant goals had a statistically significant negative relation with performance (Van Yperen et al., 2014).

Similar performance effects have been reported by studies in academic contexts where performance can be operationally defined as academic achievement. Previous literature on the effects of goal orientations on academic achievement have identified that, due to the tendencies of individuals with a learning goal orientation to focus on improving ability and performance orientated individuals focusing on task performance and comparisons, learning goal oriented students tend to have greater academic achievement (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 2000). Across a two-year longitudinal study assessing high school students' achievement in their mathematics courses, a learning goal orientation was associated with a decreased

likelihood of believing failures were due to a lack of ability, with the investment of more effort, and with significantly greater increases in performance through higher grades (Blackwell, et al., 2007). These students not only increased their academic performance, but their beliefs allowed them to outperform the students who held performance goals (i.e. assumed their intelligence/abilities were fixed; Blackwell et al., 2007). In other cases, however, both learning goal oriented and performance prove oriented individuals obtained similar higher grades, outperforming those with a performance avoid orientation (Dekker, Krabbendam, Lee, Boschloo, De Groot, & Jolles, 2016). Despite these differences in findings, an overall trend of learning goal oriented individuals having better academic achievement in the long run is expected due to their more adaptive strategies (Dekker et al., 2016; Karlen, Suter, Hirt, & Merki, 2019; Mattern, 2005). The discrepancies in academic achievement for performance prove and avoid may be explained by the tendency for individuals with a fixed ability view to disengage when they hit an impediment in their learning (Dweck, 2000). Moreover, performance avoid individuals have been shown to be more emotionally vulnerable, with heightened anxiety and fear of failure that could explain their lower grades (Daniels et al., 2008, Tanaka, Takehara, & Yamauchi, 2006).

In line with the above, it is expected that a learning goal orientation will be positively related to an increase in work performance. While there is a debatable positive relation between performance prove goal orientation and performance, the present study assessed improved performance across the internship. As performance prove individuals tend to focus on impression management rather than improving their abilities, it is unclear whether a performance prove orientation would impact a change in performance in the current study. Given the competing possibilities, the relationship between performance prove goal orientation and change in performance will be explored via a research question. Lastly, in line with Van Yperen et al.'s (2014) study, it is expected that performance avoid goal orientation will negatively predict increased performance as these individuals don't believe abilities are malleable and will shy away from situations where they may face inadequacies.

Hypothesis 1a: Interns' learning goal orientation will lead to a positive change in performance.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between interns' performance prove goal orientation and change in performance?

Hypothesis 1b: Interns' performance avoid goal orientation will lead to a negative change in performance.

As outlined above, in addition to understanding the impact of goal orientations on performance, the present study will also assess the impact of goal orientations on learning throughout the internship, given the educational roots of goal orientation and internships being an important context for students to learn and incorporate skills for their future careers.

In a study conducted at the university of Hong Kong, Hong, Chiu, Dweck, and Lin (1998 as cited by Dweck, 2000) assessed the implication of student's goal orientations on intentions to learn. At the university, because all courses are conducted in English, the researchers assessed the implications of students' goal orientations on their intention to take remedial English courses. This is based on the assumption that, for those who had obtained lower scores on their proficiency exams, taking a remedial course to improve their English skills would be instrumental for their success in future studies. Learning goal oriented individuals were found to attribute negative feedback to their effort levels and took remedial actions in situations where their scores were unsatisfactory (Hong et al., 1998 as cited by Dweck, 2000). In line with this finding, Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, and Wan (1999) discovered that the remedial actions taken by learning goal oriented individuals were mediated by their attributions of their effort. That is, the tendency for individuals with a learning goal orientation to attribute abilities to their own efforts increases their willingness to take remedial actions. Performance-oriented individuals displayed the opposite reactions. These individuals created a helplessness pattern, as they did not take remedial actions to improve their abilities after performing poorly initially. These differences in mindset demonstrate that individuals who are learning goal oriented view success as learning, whereas those with a performance-orientation prefer to feel success in the moment, hiding their shortfalls rather than focusing on the strategies that would lead to further success (Hong et al., 1999).

A learning goal orientation has been associated with obtaining higher grades through students' greater understanding, interest, and more sophisticated learning strategies leading to these students outperforming those with a performance prove goal orientation (Mattern, 2005). Learning goal oriented individuals are more likely to value strategies of self-testing and restudying, and have a higher motivation to learn (Yan, Thai, & Bjork, 2014). In line with these

studying methods, learning goal orientations may also impact other “productive learning behaviours”, such as seeking constructive criticisms (Cutumisu, 2019).

In line with the aforementioned research findings and learning patterns, it is expected that individuals with a learning goal orientation will be more likely to learn during their internship. Given performance prove and avoid individuals’ learning patterns, these performance orientations are expected to negatively predict learning in the internship setting.

Hypothesis 2a: Interns’ learning goal orientation will be positively related to learning.

Hypothesis 2b: Interns’ performance prove goal orientation will be negatively related to learning.

Hypothesis 2c: Interns’ performance avoid goal orientation will be negatively related to learning.

The Mediating Role of Feedback Seeking

While the links between goal orientation style and outcomes such as learning and performance have received a lot of academic attention, it is important to understand the mechanisms through which these relationships occur. It has been hypothesised that feedback helps employees understand what is expected of them, so they may behave in a way that allows them to meet those expectations (Whitaker & Levy, 2012). It also allows for them to correct any weaknesses they may have, thereby giving way to future success and increased performance (Anseel, et al., 2015; Whitaker & Levy, 2012). This link however has been heavily debated in the literature with contradictory findings. While feedback has been shown to improve employee performance through perceptions of role clarity (Whitaker & Levy, 2012), this relation has not always been supported, leading to a debate on whether feedback seeking always leads to improved performance.

Ashford and Cummings (1983) first proposed feedback seeking as an important resource for employees. While feedback is a way for organizations to improve performance, it is also a way for employees to increase their personal performance. As individuals form personal goals within an organization, their feedback regarding such goals could be a valuable source of information. Feedback seeking behaviours can be seen as an “effective self-regulatory strategy” to improve task performance, reduce uncertainty, and thereby increase job performance and job attitudes (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015, p.319). Feedback seeking can be done

directly through interactions with a supervisor (known as inquiry), or indirectly by observing cues from others regarding one's behaviour (known as monitoring; Ashford & Cummings, 1983).

Over the years, goal orientation has been shown to be a predictor of feedback-seeking behaviour and processes (Anseel et al., 2015; Vandewalle et al., 2019). Recent studies have focused on the specific effects of each goal orientation on feedback seeking, the types of feedback sought, and the motivations behind feedback seeking (Ashford, De Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016).

As previously stated, individuals with a learning goal orientation see their abilities as malleable and as such, they strive to improve upon them despite challenges (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The motives for individuals with learning goal orientations to seek feedback has been associated with their need for acquiring useful information and achieving role clarity (Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002; Payne et al., 2007; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). In line with this research, it is expected that because learning goal oriented individuals want to improve and believe feedback seeking is a means of doing so, they will be more likely to engage in these behaviours. Previous studies assessing this relation have found a learning goal orientation mindset to be positively related to adaptive self-regulatory strategies such as feedback-seeking behaviour (Heslin, & Latham, 2004; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000). In line with this, seeking critical feedback has also been shown to be due to individuals having a growth mindset (Zingoni & Byron, 2017). Finally, in their meta-analysis, Anseel et al. (2015) assessed ten studies and found a modest, positive correlation between a learning goal orientation and feedback-seeking behavior, however they did suggest this relationship should be interpreted with caution as although the relationship was positive overall, it has sometimes been found to be zero or slightly negative. Yamkovenko and Hatala (2014) found similar relationships, providing a framework that suggested individuals with a learning goal orientation are motivated by instrumental considerations to seek more feedback (i.e. asking for specific evaluation of their performance).

An individual's goal orientation affects how an individual views and responds to goal setting (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Those with a learning goal orientation persist when faced with challenges and see failure as a learning experience (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The positive way in which individuals with a learning goal orientation see

challenges is related to their mastery-oriented framework. These individuals may use feedback to improve their abilities. Moreover, when faced with feedback they place importance on the expectancy value of feedback (VandeWalle, 2003). Performance has been related to skill-improvement related goals such that individuals with skill improvement goals versus positive comparison goals and avoid negative evaluation goals perform better (Brett and Vandewalle, 1999). Individuals with a learning goal orientation desire useful information (Tuckey et al., 2002), and tend to use this feedback to improve their abilities (Farr, 1993 as cited in VandeWalle, 2003). Indeed, in one study, even though individuals with a learning goal orientation rated negative feedback as not useful, in follow up surveys one month later these individuals saw the usefulness of the negative feedback and rated it as such (Brett & Atwater, 2001). It is therefore hypothesized that learning goal oriented individuals will use information obtained from feedback in a meaningful way in order to improve their abilities. Specifically, for an individual with a learning goal orientation, the reason they are able to improve their performance is through effective use of the feedback they obtain.

Individuals with a performance prove goal orientation, as previously outlined, view their abilities as fixed and have a need to demonstrate their abilities (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). In previous studies assessing the relation between performance prove goal orientation and feedback seeking, results have been mixed; with some finding a negative relationship, (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997) and others a positive relationship (Van der Rijt, Van den Bossche, Van de Wiel, Segers, & Gijsselaers, 2012). The motivations of performance prove oriented individuals to seek feedback has been linked to impression management such as receiving praise (Tuckey et al., 2002), and to wanting to demonstrate their superiority over their coworkers (Vandewalle, 1997). Previous negative findings may be attributable to individuals with performance goal orientations often backing away from a challenge (VandeWalle, 2003). Failure would bring attention to the fact that an individual with performance prove does not have said ability. However, due to the motivations to demonstrate superiority and receive praise, in most contexts performance prove oriented individuals will likely still seek feedback (Tuckey et al., 2002; Vandewalle, 1997). The motivations behind this feedback seeking, however, suggest the outcomes of feedback sought will differ from those with a learning goal. For example, in a study conducted by Butler (1993), participants were placed in one of two conditions: completing a simple or a challenging task. At the end of each task, participants were given the option to go straight to the next task or select

from five kinds of feedback information. Individuals with performance goal orientations sought more comparative feedback (i.e. understanding their rank compared to others) during a challenging task compared to both performance goal oriented individuals in the low skill condition and learning goal oriented individuals across conditions (Butler, 1993). This suggests that, compared to individuals with learning goal orientations, the motives behind individuals with performance prove orientations' feedback seeking is not intended for improvement. As such, although we expect performance prove goal orientation to be positively related to feedback seeking, it is not expected that feedback seeking would mediate the relationship between performance prove goal orientation and improved performance, because of the motives behind the feedback-seeking behaviour.

Lastly, while individuals with a performance avoid goal orientation also view their abilities as fixed, these individuals avoid situations in which they may be seen as incompetent (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). This is achieved by avoiding situations in which they may face negative feedback (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). In previous studies, individuals with a performance avoid goal orientation tended to request less feedback (Van der Rijt et al., 2012; VandeWalle and Cummings, 1997). Similarly, Tuckey et al. (2002) found that individuals with ego defence desires and those motivated to manage impressions defensively tend to request less feedback. Based on these findings, we expect that performance avoid goal oriented individuals will be less likely to engage in feedback seeking, specifically that performance avoid goal orientation will be negatively related to feedback seeking because it would place the individual in a possible position of facing negative feedback. Research has shown that individuals with performance avoid orientations tend to avoid tasks in situations in which they feel they might fail, in order to avoid negative feedback (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). Given the negative association expected between performance avoid goal orientation and feedback seeking, it is hypothesized that feedback seeking will mediate the negative relationship between performance avoid goal orientation and improved performance.

Hypothesis 3a: Feedback seeking behaviours will mediate the positive relationship between learning goal orientation and change in performance.

Hypothesis 3b: Feedback seeking behaviours will mediate the negative relationship between performance avoid goal orientation and change in performance.

In assessing the mediating role of feedback seeking on goal orientation and learning, it is expected that the pattern of hypotheses will be similar to the mediating role of feedback seeking on goal orientation and improved performance. Given the greater understanding, interest, and more sophisticated learning strategies of learning goal oriented individuals described above, it is expected that the feedback sought by learning goal orientated individuals will be in line with their learning strategies, and thus, would be used in a manner that would allow them to demonstrate greater learning throughout their internship (Mattern, 2005). Learning goal orientation has been associated with both feedback-seeking behaviour and deeper learning approaches (Leenknecht, Hompus, & Van der Schaaf, 2019). It is therefore hypothesized that feedback seeking will mediate the relationship between learning goal orientation and learning. As previously outlined, individuals with a performance prove orientation will not use the feedback they seek to learn in the same way as learning goal oriented individuals would. They do not have the same motivations to grow their knowledge, but rather, seek feedback in order to demonstrate their knowledge. Thus, in line with Tuckey et al., 2002 and Vandewalle, 1997, feedback seeking is not expected to mediate the relationship between performance prove goal orientation and learning (;). In contrast, for individuals with performance avoid orientations, it is expected that lower levels of feedback seeking will mediate the negative relationship between this goal orientation and learning.

Hypothesis 4a: Feedback seeking behaviours will mediate the relationship between learning goal orientation and learning.

Hypothesis 4b: Feedback seeking behaviours will mediate the negative relationship between performance avoid goal orientation and learning.

The Moderating Role of Psychological Safety

An important need in the goal orientation literature is to examine potential moderators in order to have a better understanding of these variables, as well as to reconcile opposing effects (Vandewalle et al. 2019). In the present context of interns, it is particularly important to understand the implications of psychological safety given that interns are new to both their internship organization and role. In the context of goal orientation research, it is useful to examine this contextual variable to understand if a psychologically safe environment can attenuate the potentially negative relationships of the performance prove and performance avoid

goal orientations with feedback seeking, performance, and learning. Moreover, it can be used to understand if it would enhance the positive effect of a learning goal orientation.

Psychological safety is a cognitive state where employees feel as though they may be themselves “without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career” (Kahn 1990, p. 708). It encompasses “taken-for-granted beliefs” about how individuals in the work environment will react to risky interpersonal behaviours such as asking questions, seeking feedback, reporting a mistake, proposing an idea, or revealing incompetence (Edmondson 1999; Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). In a psychologically safe environment these behaviours are not only appropriate to engage in, but they may even be encouraged in employees (Newman, A., Donohue, & Eva, 201). The beliefs employees hold about such interpersonal risks result in actions that would range from being inconceivable in one work group to being the norm in another group (Jha, 2019). When employees feel comfortable to take interpersonal risks, they feel secure and are therefore able to change their behaviours (Schein & Bennis, 1965 as cited by Edmondson et al., 2004) which allows them to acquire new skills and knowledge, and perform tasks more successfully (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Maurer, Pierce, & Shore, 2002).

This greater trust in their organization has been shown to be related to increased trust in their leaders’ behaviours and intentions (Perrot et al., 2014). This trust can in turn contribute to “higher quality exchange relationships” that incite employees to increase their efforts and seek more feedback (Qian et al., 2019). Since seeking feedback from leaders can be seen as a risky behaviour, it is important that employees feel safe in their workplace and with their leaders. As described above, individuals with performance prove and avoid orientations fear revealing inadequacies in their abilities. Feeling safe and trusted by their leaders may dispel these employees’ anxiety and fear of embarrassment from engaging in the potentially risky behaviour that is feedback seeking, because they aren’t focusing on self-protection (Edmondson & Lei 2014; Edmondson et al., 2004; Qian, Liu & Chen, 2020). Research has also indicated that reduced uncertainty is a key factor in promoting feedback-seeking behavior (Anseel et al. 2015; Ashford et al. 2016; Qian et al., 2020).

Psychologically safe environments have been linked to environments in which mastery-oriented behaviours are encouraged as they promote employees to take on challenging, realistic goals, and shape setbacks in performance as learning opportunities backed by feedback (Hannah & Lester 2009; O’Keefe, Ben-Ellyahu, & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013; VandeWalle et al., 2019).

Thus, if work environments are psychologically safe, they may foster learning goal oriented behaviours in employees, such as increased feedback seeking through feelings of safety. It is therefore expected that for individuals with a learning goal orientation, a psychologically safe working environment that encourages mastery-oriented behaviours will have an exacerbating effect, meaning that these individuals will feel more open to seeking feedback from a supervisor, which would in turn lead to increased performance. A psychologically safe environment is thus expected to moderate the relationship between learning goal orientation and performance via feedback seeking. For individuals with a performance avoid orientation it is expected that a psychologically safe environment would lead them to feel more comfortable in seeking feedback. A psychologically safe environment may diminish their need to avoid potential damage to their self-image, and feelings of anxiety towards seeking feedback, which, in turn, would allow them to seek more feedback than they otherwise would (Anseel, et al., 2015). Thus, it is predicted that psychological safety will moderate the indirect relationship between performance avoid orientation and negative change in performance via feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 5a: The mediating effect of feedback seeking between learning goal orientation and increased performance will be stronger when psychological safety is high.

Hypothesis 5b: The mediating effect of feedback seeking between performance avoid goal orientation and negative change in performance will be attenuated when psychological safety is high.

In assessing the moderating role of psychological safety on the mediating effect of feedback seeking between goal orientation and learning, results are expected to mimic the pattern seen above in workplace performance. Studies assessing the relationship between psychological safety and organizational learning have identified psychological safety as a catalyst to discussions amongst team members that can enhance their learning orientation as well as organizational learning (Cauwelier, Ribière, & Bennet, 2016; Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Indeed, psychological safety has been shown to contribute to learning behaviors such as feedback seeking, and discussing errors (Edmondson, 1999; Patel, Silva, & Dahling, 2019). For individuals with a learning goal orientation, it is therefore expected that a psychologically safe context will also have an exacerbating effect on the relationship between this goal orientation and learning via feedback seeking, by encouraging these learning behaviours. Research has demonstrated that psychological safety can help individuals overcome defensiveness or learning

anxiety that would impede productive learning behaviours (Schein, 1985 as cited by Edmondson et al., 2004). A psychologically safe environment may give way to learning behaviours, as performance avoid oriented individuals would feel safer to seek feedback and discuss their abilities than they would in an environment that is not psychologically safe. It is therefore expected that psychological safety will moderate the indirect negative relationship between performance avoid orientation and learning via feedback seeking.

Hypothesis 6a: The positive mediating effect of feedback seeking between learning goal orientation and learning will be strengthened when psychological safety is high.

Hypothesis 6b: The negative mediating effect of feedback seeking between performance avoid goal orientation and learning will be attenuated when psychological safety is high.

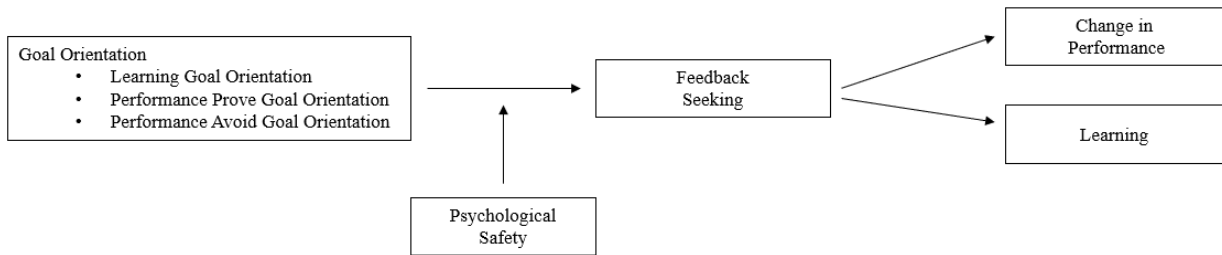


Figure 1. *Proposed research model*

Method

Sample and Procedure

The participants of the present study were university students (in fashion and in human resource management at a French university in Montreal) who were completing their program internship and their internship supervisors.

Data was collected through online questionnaires created and distributed through Qualtrics. Surveys were sent at three time points: before the start of students' internships, and at the mid and end point of their internships. At the first time point, interns completed a self-report questionnaire regarding demographics, and a variety of individual factors including their goal orientation. At the second time point, interns completed another self-report questionnaire which assessed a variety of aspects surrounding their internship, supervisor, and individual behaviours within their internships including feedback seeking behaviour and learning. Supervisors at this time point were sent their first questionnaire that included questions about demographic information, personal factors and their interns' performance. Finally, at the third time point interns were sent the same questionnaire as at Time 2, and supervisors were sent the same questionnaire as at Time 2 without goal orientation and demographic measures.

The present sample was collected across 7 semesters, or cohorts of students. Of the 338 students contacted at Time 1, 179 students responded. At Time 2 (the midpoint of students' internships), 297 of the 455 students contacted students responded and 297 of the 444 supervisors contacted responded. From this sample, a total of 211 student-supervisor dyads were identified. At Time 3 (the end of students' internships), 218 of the 294 students contacted responded and 178 of the 250 supervisors contacted responded. From this sample, a total of 141 student-supervisor dyads were identified at Time 3. For the present study, the final sample consisted of 133 students, and 70 student-supervisor combinations who responded across the three timepoints. Students were part of the fashion management (74.8%, $n = 100$) and human resource management (25.2%, $n = 33$) programs of a business school in Montreal. Among these students, 18 identified as male, 114 as female, and 1 as other/neither. They ranged in ages from 18 to 50 ($M_{age} = 23.46$, $SD = 3.5$) with 3 students refraining from reporting their age. Among supervisors, 12 identified as male, 57 as female, and they ranged in ages from 21 to 66 ($M_{age} = 36.23$, $SD = 9.26$) with 4 supervisors refraining from reporting their age. Of the supervisors who

responded, 78.6% (n = 55) supervised fashion management students and 21.4% (n = 15) supervised human resource management students.

All students received a \$5 CAD gift card to Second Cup coffee shop for each timepoint, and students who responded at all three timepoints were placed in a draw to win a \$25 CAD Amazon gift card. Moreover, the fashion students who responded at all three timepoints also received an additional 5% to their final internship grade.

Measures

Given the location of the study being conducted within a francophone university, all interns were provided their respective questionnaires below in French. As supervisors were mainly located within Montreal, a bilingual province, they were provided with both English and French versions of their respective questionnaires and given the option to respond in their preferred language. The questionnaires were translated into French using a standard translation back-translation procedure.

Goal Orientation. Interns provided their own perceptions of their goal orientation at Time 1 using VandeWalle's 13-item scale (1997). The scale consists of three subscales assessing each goal orientation type (as cited by VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001). Learning goal orientation was assessed using 4-items (for example, "I prefer challenging and difficult classes so that I'll learn a great deal"). The performance prove goal orientation subscale included 4 items (for example, "I think it's important to get good grades to show how intelligent you are"), and 5 items assessed performance avoid goal orientation (for example, "I prefer to avoid situations in classes where I could risk performing poorly"). Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The internal consistency estimate for the learning goal orientation subscale was $\alpha = .658$, $\alpha = .717$ for the performance prove subscale, and $\alpha = .616$ for the performance avoid subscale.

Feedback Seeking. For the purpose of the present study, we limited our analyses to measuring the frequency of direct inquiry. Interns reported how frequently they sought feedback about various facets of their jobs such as their overall performance, the technical aspects of their job, the values of the organization, expected attitudes and behaviours (Morrison, 1993; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000). While feedback seeking was assessed at Time 2 and Time 3, we used Time 2 feedback seeking for the present analyses. A 5-point Likert-

type scale ranging from 1 (“almost never”) to 5 (“very frequently”) was used. The internal consistency estimate for feedback seeking in this sample was $\alpha = .768$.

Psychological Safety. Interns rated their perceptions of psychological safety within their internship organization at Time 2 and Time 3 (Edmondson, 1999). Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale included items such as “Members of this work group are able to bring up problems and tough issues” and “Working with members of this work group, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized”. As with feedback seeking, scores at Time 2 were used for the analyses. The internal consistency estimate for psychological safety in this sample was $\alpha = .731$.

Learning. Intern’s learning throughout the internship was assessed using a 15-item scale assessing 21st century skills learning adapted from Kember, Leung, and Ma (2003), and 3 items from Zhou & George (2001) were added to capture creativity. We used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale included items such as “To date in my internship I improved my ability to develop fresh approaches to problems” and “Through this internship, I have improved my ability to use knowledge to solve problems in a systematic way”. While learning was assessed at Time 2 and Time 3, Time 3 learning was used for the analyses. The internal consistency estimate for learning in this sample was $\alpha = .89$.

Performance Change. Supervisors rated their intern’s performance using a 15-item scale that assessed their ability to perform 21st century skills adapted from Kember et al. (2003), and 3 items adapted from Zhou & George (2001) to capture creativity. We used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale included items such as “This intern has demonstrated the ability to bring information and ideas together from different topics to solve problems” and “This intern has demonstrated the ability to come up with creative solutions to problems”. In order to assess a change in performance, Time 3 performance scores were used as the dependent variable, while controlling for T2 performance. The internal consistency for performance at Time 2 was $\alpha = .802$, and $\alpha = .91$ at Time 3.

Control Variables. We controlled for the students’ program of study for all hypotheses (and for Time 2 performance for hypotheses with performance change as the dependent variable).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

All descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. Study program was a significant predictor for performance change, such that human resource students were less likely to experience a positive change in performance. Given this significant correlation, this variable was kept as a covariate throughout the analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive and correlation analysis

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Learning Goal orientation	3.57	.67	133	-							
2. Performance Prove Goal Orientation	2.81	.82	133	.089	-						
3. Performance avoid Goal Orientation	3.07	.69	133	-.366**	.201*	-					
4. Feedback Seeking	2.79	.74	133	.183*	-.011	-.035	-				
5. Psychological Safety	3.89	.57	133	.164	-.071	-.139	.178*	-			
6. Time 2 Performance	3.81	.48	70	-.200	.042	.034	-.053	.117	-		
7. Time 3 Performance	4.27	.46	70	-.090	-.012	-.177	-.030	.161	.515**	-	
8. Learning	4.05	.5	133	.103	.064	.764	.257**	.400**	.274*	.258*	-
9. Study Program	-	-	133	-.005	.145	-.031	-.103	.049	.344**	.022	-.085

Note * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Study program coded as 0 for fashion, 1 for human resource management.

Hypothesis Testing

The first set of hypotheses assessed the impact of goal orientations on change in performance. To test this, PROCESS v. 3.5 macro for SPSS Model 4 was used with study program and Time 2 performance as control variables. Specifically, Hypothesis 1a stated that interns' learning goal orientation would predict a positive change in performance. The results revealed that learning goal orientation was not a statistically significant predictor of positive change in performance, $\beta = .043$, $t(65) = .63$, $p = .531$. Hypothesis 1a is thus not supported, as can be seen in Table 2. Research Question 1 asked what the relationship between interns'

performance prove goal orientation and change in performance was. The results revealed that performance prove goal orientation was not a statistically significant predictor of change in performance, $\beta = .000$, $t(65) = .002$, $p = .999$. Lastly, Hypothesis 1b stated that interns' performance avoid goal orientation would be negatively related to change in performance. The results revealed that performance avoid goal orientation was a statistically significant predictor of negative change in performance, $\beta = -.145$, $t(65) = -2.186$, $p = .032$. Hypothesis 1b is thus supported, as can be seen in Table 2. In sum, learning goal orientation and performance prove goal orientation did not significantly predict performance change, while performance avoid goal orientation negatively predicted performance change.

Table 2. *Regressions on Change in Performance*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Learning Goal orientation Model:						
Constant	1.914	.614	3.12	.003	.689	3.139
Learning Goal Orientation	.043	.068	.63	.531	-.093	.178
Feedback Seeking	-.023	.067	-.338	.736	-.156	.111
Study Program	-.274	.086	-3.178	.002	-.446	-.102
T2 Performance	.612	.128	4.78	.000	.356	.867
$R = .558, R^2 = .312$ $F(4, 65) = 5.87, p = .000$						
Performance Prove Goal Orientation:						
Constant	2.099	.54	3.889	.000	1.021	3.176
Performance Prove Goal Orientation	.000	.065	.002	.999	-.13	.13
Feedback Seeking	-.011	.066	-.172	.864	-.144	.121
Study Program	-.258	.086	-2.989	.004	-.43	-.085
T2 Performance	.594	.124	4.783	.000	.346	.842
$R = .555, R^2 = .308$ $F(4, 65) = 5.844, p = .000$						
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation						
Constant	2.47	.487	5.075	.000	1.498	3.442
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation	-.145	.066	-2.186	.032	-.277	-.013
Feedback Seeking	-.014	.063	-.218	.828	-.140	.113
Study Program	-.295	.091	-3.231	.002	-.478	-.113
T2 Performance	-.616	.116	5.309	.000	.384	.848
$R = .599, R^2 = .358$ $F(4, 65) = 7.281, p = .000$						

The second set of hypotheses concerned the impact of goal orientations on learning. To test this, PROCESS v. 3.5 macro for SPSS Model 4 was used with study program as a control variable. Specifically, Hypothesis 2a stated that interns' learning goal orientation would be positively related to learning. The results revealed that learning goal orientation was not a statistically significant predictor of learning, $\beta = .043$, $t(129) = .714$, $p = .476$. Hypothesis 2b stated that interns' performance prove goal orientation would be negatively related to learning. The results revealed that performance prove goal orientation was not a negative statistically significant predictor of learning, $\beta = .046$, $t(129) = .830$, $p = .408$. Lastly, Hypothesis 2c stated that interns' performance avoid goal orientation would be negatively related to learning. The results revealed that performance avoid goal orientation was not a negative statistically significant predictor of learning, $\beta = .024$, $t(129) = .444$, $p = .658$. Thus, students' goal orientations were not significant predictors of learning, and Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c were therefore not supported, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. *Regressions on Learning*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Learning Goal orientation Model:						
Constant	3.464	.232	14.901	.000	3.004	3.924
Learning Goal Orientation	.043	.061	.714	.476	-.077	.164
Feedback Seeking	.161	.055	2.911	.004	.052	.271
Study Program	-.068	.105	-.650	.517	-.275	.139
$R = .27, R^2 = .073$						
$F(3, 129) = 4.022 p = .009$						
Performance Prove Goal Orientation Model:						
Constant	3.472	.214	16.213	.000	3.049	3.896
Performance Prove Goal Orientation	.046	.056	.83	.408	-.064	.156
Feedback Seeking	.168	.054	3.12	.002	.062	.275
Study Program	-.08	.105	-.761	.448	-.287	.128
$R = .274, R^2 = .075$						
$F(3, 129) = 3.754 p = .013$						
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation Model:						
Constant	3.522	.24	14.7	.000	3.048	3.996
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation	.024	.054	.444	.658	-.083	.131
Feedback Seeking	.169	.054	3.15	.002	.063	.276
Study Program	-.066	.104	-.629	.530	-.272	.141
$R = .265, R^2 = .07$						
$F(3, 129) = 3.6 p = .015$						

The third set of hypotheses concerned the role of feedback seeking as a mediator between interns' goal orientations and change in performance. In order to test these hypotheses, the PROCESS v. 3.5 macro for SPSS Model 4 was used with study program and Time 2 performance as control variables, as seen in Table 2. Hypothesis 3a stated that feedback seeking behaviours would mediate the positive relationship between interns' learning goal orientation and change in performance. The results revealed that, while interns' learning goal orientation was a significant predictor of feedback seeking, $\beta = .289$, $t(66) = 2.128$, $p = .037$, feedback seeking was not a statistically significant mediator, $\beta = -.007$, $SE = .022$, $CI [-.061, .029]$. Hypothesis 3b stated that feedback seeking behaviours would mediate the negative relationship between interns' performance avoid goal orientation and change in performance. The results revealed that feedback seeking was not a statistically significant mediator, $\beta = .000$, $SE = .009$, $CI [-.017, .021]$. Moreover, interns' performance avoid goal orientation was not a statistically significant predictor of feedback seeking $\beta = -.016$, $t(66) = -.12$, $p = .905$. Thus, as seen in Table 4, contrary to Hypotheses 3a and 3b, feedback seeking was not a significant mediator between learning and performance avoid goal orientations and change in performance.

Table 4. *Mediating effect of feedback seeking on change in performance (controls included)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Goal Orientation				
Learning Goal Orientation	-.007	.022	-.061	.029
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation	.000	.009	-.017	.021

The fourth set of hypotheses concerned the role of feedback seeking as a mediator between interns' goal orientations and learning. In order to test these hypotheses, the PROCESS v. 3.5 macro for SPSS Model 4 was used with study program as a control variable, as seen in Table 3. Hypothesis 4a stated that feedback seeking behaviours would mediate the positive relationship between interns' learning goal orientation and learning. The results revealed that interns' learning goal orientation was a significant predictor of feedback seeking, $\beta = .199$, $t(130) = 2.178$, $p = .031$, and feedback seeking was a statistically significant mediator, $\beta = .032$, $SE = .019$, $CI [.002, .073]$, supporting Hypothesis 4a. Hypothesis 4b stated that feedback seeking

behaviours would mediate the negative relationship between interns' performance avoid goal orientation and learning. Contrary to Hypothesis 4b, the results revealed that feedback seeking was not a statistically significant mediator, $\beta = -.007$, $SE = .017$, $CI [-.044, .024]$. Moreover, interns' performance avoid goal orientation was not a statistically significant predictor of feedback seeking $\beta = -.041$, $t(130) = -.438$, $p = .662$. Thus, feedback seeking was a significant mediator between learning goal orientation and learning, but it was not a significant mediator between performance avoid learning goal orientation and learning, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. *Mediating effect of feedback seeking on learning (controls included)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Goal Orientation				
Learning Goal Orientation	.032	.019	.002	.073
Performance Avoid Goal Orientation	-.007	.017	-.044	.024

The fifth set of hypotheses concerned the moderating role of psychological safety on the mediating effect of feedback seeking between interns' goal orientations and performance change. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables, including study program and Time 2 performance as controls, were entered into the PROCESS v3.5 macro for SPSS using model 7. Means were centered and a heteroscedasticity consistent standard error and covariance matrix estimator was used when running the analyses. Hypothesis 5a stated that the mediating effect of feedback seeking between learning goal orientation and increased performance would be stronger when psychological safety is high. The results revealed that psychological safety did not have a statistically significant moderating role, $\beta = .000$, $SE = .025$, $CI [-.048, .058]$. Hypothesis 5b stated that the mediating effect of feedback seeking between performance avoid goal orientation and negative change in performance would be attenuated when psychological safety is high. The results revealed that psychological safety did not have a statistically significant moderating role, $\beta = .007$, $SE = .036$, $CI [-.057, .091]$. Thus, contrary to Hypotheses 5a and 5b, psychological safety was not a significant moderator of the mediating effect of feedback seeking between interns' learning and performance avoid goal orientations and performance change.

The sixth set of hypotheses concerned the moderating role of psychological safety on the mediating effect of feedback seeking between interns' goal orientations and learning. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables, including study program as a control, were entered into the

PROCESS v3.5 macro for SPSS using model 7. Hypothesis 6a stated that the positive mediating effect of feedback seeking between learning goal orientation and learning would be stronger when psychological safety is high. The results revealed that psychological safety did not have a statistically significant moderating role, $\beta = -.022$, $SE = .033$, $CI [-.08, .055]$. Hypothesis 6b stated that the negative mediating effect of feedback seeking between performance avoid goal orientation and learning would be attenuated when psychological safety is high. The results revealed that psychological safety did not have a statistically significant moderating role, $\beta = -.026$, $SE = .037$, $CI [-.113, .036]$. Thus, contrary to Hypotheses 6a and 6b, psychological safety was not a significant moderator on the mediating effect of feedback seeking between interns' learning and performance prove goal orientations and learning.

Discussion

Despite the extant literature on goal orientations, and their seemingly critical relevance in organizations, the findings to date remain mixed, and further research is needed to truly understand their impact. The present study assessed the impact of goal orientation through feedback seeking on change in performance and learning in an internship context, and the role of psychological safety as a contextual boundary condition. In doing so, it offered theoretical contributions to the literature by (1) assessing the process by which, and conditions under which goal orientation can impact changes in performance and learning; (2) bridging the educational roots of goal orientation theory with the management literature; and (3) implementing a longitudinal methodology with multiple raters. Data was collected from student interns and their supervisors at three time points throughout the students' internships. The findings from this study suggest that performance avoid goal orientation predicts a negative change in performance across students' internships as rated by their supervisors. Moreover, interns' learning goal orientation has a positive effect on their learning through feedback seeking.

The present study attempted to better understand the relation between goal orientation and performance by looking at change in performance rather than performance as a static concept, and found a direct effect between performance avoid goal orientation and a negative change in performance. However, no other hypotheses related to change in performance were supported. This may be due to the way performance was measured in this internship context. That is, change in performance was assessed with relatively little time between the two time points. As such, the value may have been too small to detect an effect. Put differently, the internship context itself may have had an impact that was not accounted for whereby the length of the internship was not great enough to detect a significant change in performance from the midpoint to the end. While there is limited research using a longitudinal design in understanding the impact of goal orientation on performance, one study assessing performance after an organizational change measured performance over 12 months, including the months of training and 6 months of performance data after implementation of the change (Ahearne et al., 2010). In comparison, a large majority of the student internships in the present sample were only one university semester (roughly 4 months) in length, and performance was calculated comparing the halfway mark of the internship to the end (i.e. only a couple of months). Thus, the internship context itself may play a role, in terms of the length of the internship, but also in that the

expectations supervisors have for their interns may not be analogous to the performance standards held for employees. Even so, if expectations of performance are analogous to those of employees, it may be difficult to capture a change as employee assessments are normally conducted at larger interval times. Nevertheless, a direct effect was found between performance avoid and change in performance, which perhaps alludes to just how detrimental a performance avoid orientation may be, even in a short span, as previous findings have suggested (Van Yperen et al., 2014).

Regarding the effects of goal orientations on learning throughout the internship context, the results of the present study were only partially in line with previous research (Dweck, 2000; Mattern, 2005). As hypothesized, feedback seeking mediated the relationship between learning goal orientation and learning, supporting previous research (Leenknecht, et al., 2019). This demonstrates that both feedback-seeking behaviour and deeper learning approaches by individuals with learning goal orientations extend to their workplace experiences, and have positive impacts similar to those seen in the classroom. Moreover, these abilities extend from technical classroom learning to the soft skills learned throughout the internship experience. Although it was hypothesized that the mediating effect of feedback seeking between learning goal orientation and learning would be stronger when psychological safety was high, the present study's results did not support this. This is interesting as it may signify that students with a learning goal orientation are particularly resilient, as low psychological safety in the workplace did not deter their learning. Interestingly, while performance avoid goal orientation had a negative impact on performance change, this negative effect was not seen on learning. However, the hypothesis that the mediating effect of feedback seeking between performance avoid goal orientation and negative change in performance and learning would be attenuated by high psychological safety, this was not supported. This may signal that performance avoid goal orientation has a strong negative impact across contexts.

Theoretical Implications

This study has addressed calls in the goal orientation literature to include more longitudinal data, conducted in field settings (Bråten & Strømsø, 2004; VandeWalle et al., 2019). In employing a longitudinal methodology, this study allowed for the assessment of change in performance rather than just performance at one timepoint, as has been done in the majority of the literature preceding the present study (VandeWalle et al., 2019). The use of longitudinal data

is encouraged as it will enrich our understanding of the implications of goal orientations in the workplace. While the present study found limited statistically significant results, future research should continue to employ this longitudinal or change perspective of understanding goal orientation while taking into consideration the limitations of the present study in designing their methodology.

The context under which the present study took place responded to the need for more goal orientation research in the workplace, while still being connected to the educational roots of goal orientation theory. By having a setting of student internships that merged the management and educational psychology literature, the present study contributed to furthering our understanding of the impact of goal orientations. The results of the impact of learning goal orientation on learning within the internship context has added continual support for the importance of learning goal orientations. The present study has demonstrated that the benefits of students with learning goal orientations employing better learning strategies extend to practical domains outside the classroom (Hong et al., 1999; Mattern, 2005; Yan et al., 2014). Moreover, the findings demonstrate the detrimental effect of having a performance avoid goal orientation in the workplace (Van Yperen et al., 2014). While previous research had shown a negative relationship between performance avoid and performance, the present results demonstrate that performance actually worsened over time, signaling a particular concern for these students once they transition into organizations.

Practical Implications

The results from the present study emphasize the importance of promoting a learning goal orientation, and discouraging a performance avoid goal orientation. Of the three goal orientations, students with a learning goal orientation were the only ones to report significant results of learning throughout their internship, through their feedback seeking. This supports previous research of the benefits to learning seen in individuals with a learning goal orientation (Cutumisu, 2019; Hong et al., 1999; Mattern, 2005). Moreover, psychological safety was not shown to moderate this relationship. This non-finding may actually highlight a resilience in these learning goal oriented individuals in that they were able to continue to seek feedback and learn throughout their internship regardless of how psychologically safe they felt. Thus, encouraging a goal orientation mindset within the workplace may be of additional benefit in instances of lower psychological safety. Performance avoid goal orientation on the other hand, was the only goal

orientation that demonstrated a negative change in performance throughout the internship. Thus, these students have a particular disadvantage in the workplace and would therefore benefit the most from learning strategies to shift their mindsets to be more in line with learning goal orientations.

Promoting a learning goal orientation within the workplace can be done through the encouragement of leaders to develop a learning goal oriented environment for employees (VandeWalle 2003). This can be done by setting meaningful, challenging goals, employing an environment where setbacks in performance are seen as learning opportunities with constructive feedback, promoting a psychologically safe environment, or redefining performance metrics that encourage adaptability and learning (Ahearne et al., 2010; Hannah & Lester 2009; O’Keefe et al. 2013). Using social cognitive theory, if leaders model these learning goal oriented behaviours, they may then be transferred into employee behaviours in the workplace (VandeWalle et al., 2019). Given the context of the present study, it also stands to reason that this encouragement of learning goal orientations should begin in the classroom in order for students to begin their internships ready to learn and make the most of their experience. Individuals in charge of creating these internship programs should use this body of literature to help promote these behaviours, both in students and within the internship setting in which students are sent, by including these aspects in performance evaluations, thereby encouraging internship organizations to also employ learning oriented environments.

Limitations, and Future Directions

In attempting to fill research gaps within this literature, through the inclusion of a longitudinal design merging both education and organizational implications of goal orientations, the present study was not without its limitations. First, given the need for data across three time points for students and matching data at two timepoints with their supervisors, the result was a low sample size across the student cohorts. The concern of a smaller sample size is exacerbated given the complexity of the present model. Future research, with larger data samples, including matched supervisor data, is needed in order to truly understand the relations amongst the variables in the proposed model.

Although a validated goal orientation scale was used (VandeWalle, 1997), the internal consistency estimate for the goal orientations barely met what is generally considered the acceptable threshold for reliability. This may be in part due to the way in which the questionnaire

was designed, as rather than grouping the goal orientation subscales, the subscale questions for each goal orientation were mixed. This order may have caused some confusion in participants, leading to lower reliability of student goal orientation scores.

In addition to the above limitations, future research may want to look past the frequency of feedback seeking and look at other facets that may be more meaningful in increasing performance or learning such as the types, target, methods, and timing of feedback seeking (VandeWalle, 2003). These multiple facets may give a better understanding of the ways in which goal orientations impact feedback seeking and in turn, how to better develop these types of feedback seeking that best impact performance and learning. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated the importance of intern-supervisor exchange and its impact on learning and performance (Rose, Teo, & Connell, 2014). In exploring the present constructs, future research should include these dynamics between interns and their supervisors through concepts of leader member exchange, social cognitive theory or through the similarities or discrepancies between supervisor and subordinate goal orientations (Anseel et al., 2015; Bandura, 1997). These dynamics may play an important role in understanding feedback seeking in the internship context and provide ways to support both organizations and students in building environments that foster learning and performance.

Conclusion

This research has shown that students' learning goal orientation has a positive effect on their learning through their feedback seeking, while their performance avoid goal orientation has a detrimental effect on their change in performance throughout their internship. These findings suggest the importance of encouraging learning goal oriented behaviour, and discouraging performance avoid goal oriented behaviour in the workplace to benefit from learning experiences in an internship context. The present study also encourages further investigations in this research domain to offer a different, possibly richer understanding of goal orientations, learning, and performance in the workplace.

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