

Exploring the role of the emotional process in feedback contexts at the university

The beginning of a Grounded Theory research

JURE 2021

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Introduction

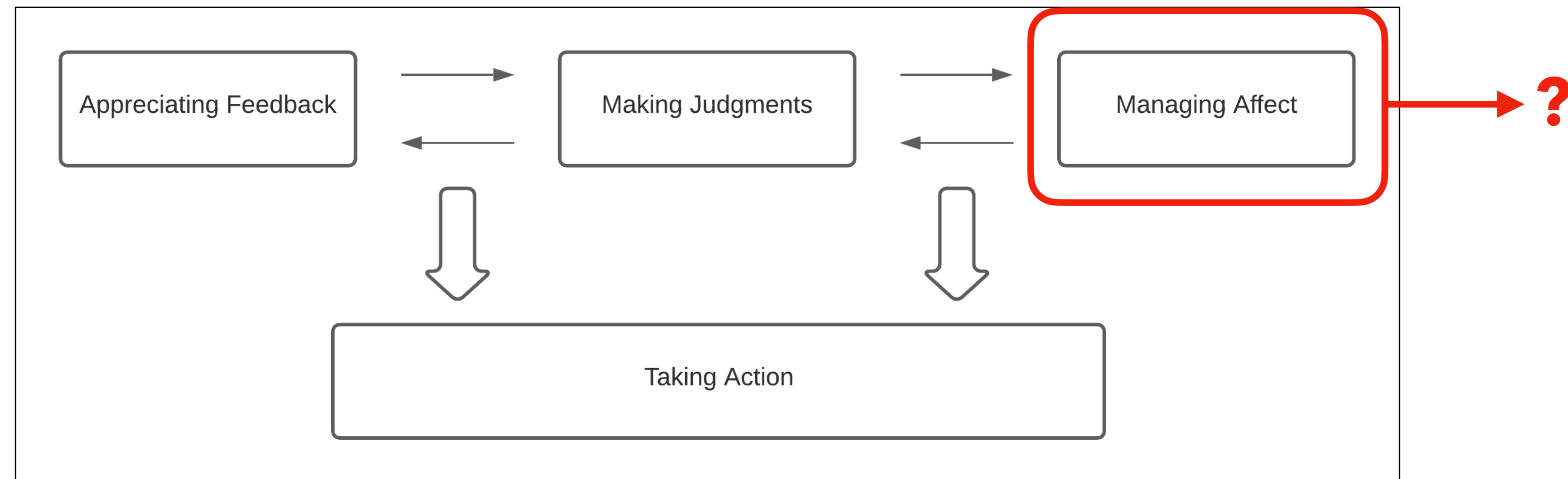
- Feedback was found to be a powerful support for student learning and regulation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)
- In recent years, a shift has begun in the way feedback is understood in higher education (Henderson et al., 2019)
 - Feedback is nowadays understood more as a complex process than as a product that would just be transmitted as feedback information to a student
 - Literature is now addressing questions more related to the dispositions or capabilities by which a student will receive and integrate feedback, in order to make relevant and constructive use of it for his or her learning (Winstone & Carless, 2019)

Conceptual framework : Feedback

- « *Information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify the learner's thinking or behavior in order to improve learning* » (Shute, 2008)
- « *A process in which students make sense of feedback and use it to improve their work and learning strategies* » (Carless & Boud, 2018)
 - The student moves from a passive to an active role in a complex process!
- To date, the scientific literature dedicated to the concept of feedback thus points to an “old” and a “new” paradigm (Henderson et al., 2019, Winstone & Carless, 2019)
- The concept of Feedback Literacy (Sutton, 2012) perfectly illustrates this new paradigm

Conceptual framework : Feedback

- The Carless and Boud's (2018) « *Student Feedback Literacy model* »



Conceptual framework : Feedback

- Among these three main skills, the management of affect is not very explicit
 - In summary, Carless and Boud (2018) essentially recommend avoiding negative affect because of their detrimental effect on feedback uptake
- We thought it was necessary to go further because the concept of affect is quite broad and there are more functional, more adapted concepts to describe some form of affective management, such as emotions
 - However « [...] emotions are recognized as difficult to conceptualize, with terms like emotion, affect, mood, feeling, often used interchangeably and variably in the literature » (Rowe, 2017)
 - Risk of confusion and/or approximation...
 - It is therefore necessary to understand what emotions are in order to appreciate their role in feedback situations

Conceptual framework : Emotions

- Emotion is *"a set of episodic variations in several components of the organism in response to events evaluated as important to the organism"* (translated from Sander & Scherer, 2019)
 - Like the new feedback paradigm, emotions are more of a process than a product
- Scherer (1984, 2001), established that five components influence each other within this process
 - 1) cognitive appraisal of the triggering event, 2) psychophysiological response, 3) expressions, 4) action tendency, and 5) subjective feeling
- Emotions have more characteristics than just valence. They can for instance be pleasant or unpleasant, but also of high or low intensity, activating or deactivating...
- In learning contexts, there are a few categories of « academic emotions » (Pekrun & Stephens, 2012), including :
 - 1) Achievement emotions, 2) Epistemic emotions, 3) Topic emotions and 4) Social emotions

Conceptual framework : Emotions

- Emotions essentially fulfill an adaptive function. It allows us to adequately face the events we are confronted with
 - Nevertheless, it can happen that this adaptive character is insufficient, and that our emotions, then dysfunctional, constitute obstacles to the achievement of our goals for instance
 - These situations require the use of « emotional competencies » (Mikolajczak, 2014) :
 - « *Emotional competencies [...] refer to differences in the way individuals identify, express, understand, use, and regulate their emotions and those of others* » (translated from Mikolajczak, 2014)
 - Thanks to our emotional competencies, it is possible, to some extent, to act on our emotions
- ➔ If we consider emotions as (1) a multicomponent process, (2) emotional competencies and (3) the different categories of emotions, the affective part of feedback literacy seems to be far more complex than it seems at first sight!

Research method

- In order to better understand the way in which students' emotions intervene when they receive and interpret feedback in an academic context, we chose the Grounded Theory method (Lejeune, 2014)
 - Here, the - usually successive - stages of problematization, data collection, data analysis and writing are carried out simultaneously in several iterations
 - Another important feature is that the respondents talk about their own experiences and that each interview provides the basis for the following interview and questioning. Thus, the researcher progressively develops his understanding of the investigated phenomenon and each interview is influenced by it

Research method

1. We defined the research questions
2. We prepared an interview guide. Its purpose is to help the investigator towards the relevant dimensions to explore during the interview
 - i.e., different types of feedback received, contexts and issues related to the feedback, students' feelings, perceived reactions, psychological, motivational, physiological, emotions management during the feedback episode and afterwards...
3. We conducted a first semi-structured interview with a first-year master's degree student
4. We analyzed the interview through phases of coding of the verbatims, of identification of several relevant properties, and of articulation of these properties in order to establish a first structured understanding of the phenomenon explored

First results

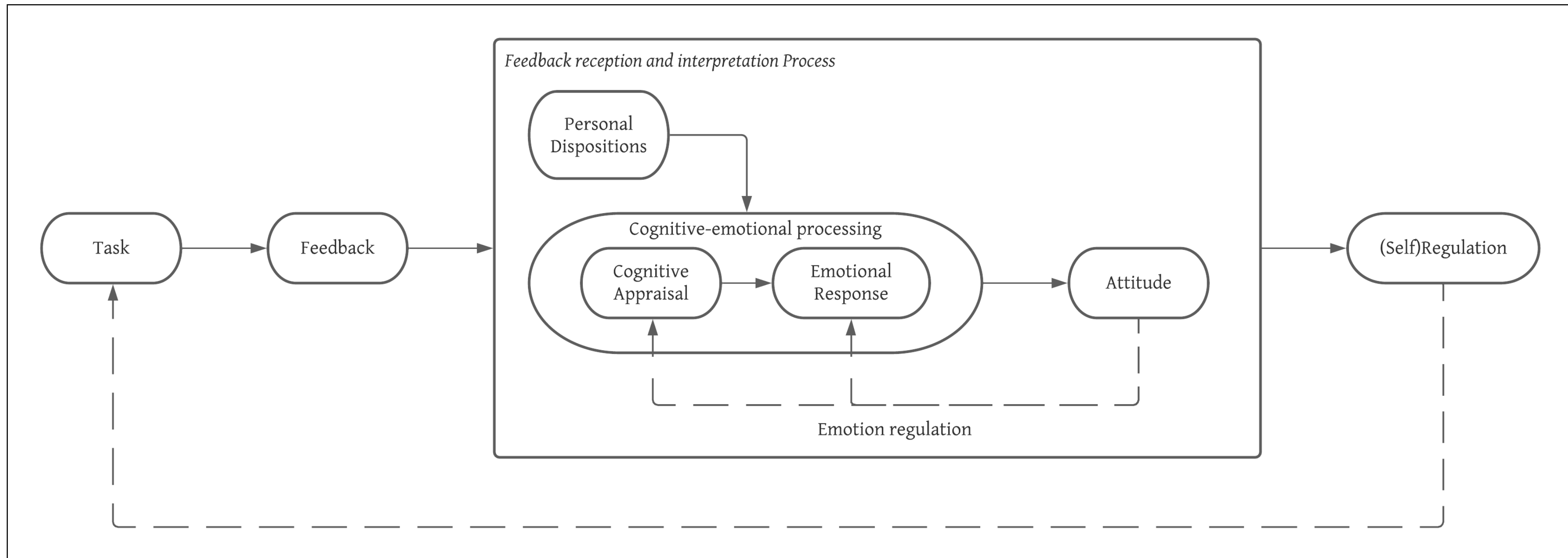
- Feedback generate emotions within the student
 - Depending on the valence of the feedback and the student's expectations, these emotions will be pleasant or unpleasant, of high or low intensity
- Feedback, when cognitively evaluated, is indeed the trigger for the emotional episode
 - The student explained that he/she generated an expectation of feedback prior to formal feedback. The external feedback, by confirming or denying the expectation of feedback (or internal feedback), generates an emotion of variable intensity according to the gap observed between the two (low intensity on low gap and vice versa). Furthermore, the consistency between the feedback expectations and the formal feedback also influences the nature of the emotion felt
- Depending on the content of the feedback and the way it is provided to the student, feedback can generate a mix of emotions (e.g., joy, hope, disappointment), which emerge during multiple iterations of the cognitive appraisal phase
- The student has emotional abilities that allow him/her to identify, understand, express and manage his/her emotions. However, some emotional regulation strategies are still unconscious and automated, which sometimes leads to the deployment of dysfunctional strategies

First results

- Receiving negative feedback, when it is associated with high stakes, is difficult for the student, especially if the student was expecting positive feedback
 - Emergence of an unpleasant emotion (e.g., sadness), of high intensity
 - Need for an emotional regulation strategy
- The emotional regulation strategies preferred by the student when experiencing an unpleasant emotion following feedback are 1) emotional expressions (e.g., crying), 2) social sharing (e.g., seeking support), and 3) modification of the situation that caused the emotional response
- Feedback of positive valence generate pleasant emotions (e.g., pride) and engage less emotional regulation strategies by the student

First results

- These first analyses allowed us to build the draft of a model of the cognitive-emotional processing of feedback by the students



Discussion

- At this - very initial - stage of our research, our first results and their transposition into a model agree with the main contributions provided by the scientific literature on emotions in learning :
 - Feedback generates emotions and these are generally consistent with the valence of the feedback (Pekrun & Perry, 2014)
 - The integration of affect management in Carless and Boud's (2018) model is amply justified. The latter can be declined into a series of competencies (Mikolajczak, 2014), among which emotional regulation is often necessary (Fischer, Romainville & Philippot, 2020)
 - The student's experience indicates that cognitive and emotional activities are entangled (Sander & Scherer, 2019)
 - According to the student's experience, it seems that the process of receiving and interpreting feedback is influenced by his/her personal dispositions. Among these, the expectations of feedback, the goals pursued, the motivational beliefs, but also, for example, the emotional knowledge is all elements that will give the cognitive appraisal all its subjectivity
- The future interviews and further steps of our research will definitely lead us to develop our model in a more precise way, or to increase the robustness of the elements that compose it

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Thank you for your attention

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