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What can higher education learn from feedback seeking behaviour in organisations? Implications for feedback literacy

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Abstract

While there is now extensive research on informal feedback seeking behaviour by employees in organisations, this literature has received limited attention in higher education. This paper addresses the gap between the two fields of feedback literacy and feedback seeking behaviour. Key organisational feedback seeking behaviour concepts including employee intentions in seeking feedback, the practice of weighing costs and benefits before seeking feedback, the qualities sought in potential feedback providers, feedback seeker characteristics that influence feedback seeking behaviour, and a range of feedback seeking methods and outcomes are outlined and their potential implications for feedback literacy are considered. The paper draws on feedback seeking behaviour literature to propose a research agenda for establishing a stronger and more nuanced understanding of feedback literacy in higher education.

Keywords: feedback seeking behaviour, feedback literacy, eliciting feedback

Introduction

Discontent with feedback from the perspectives of both students and academics has been widely documented and lamented for several decades, exemplified by recent national student surveys in Australia (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching 2019) and the UK (Office for Students 2019) which show continuing relatively low levels of satisfaction with the timeliness and helpfulness of feedback. While improving ratings on specific items has consequently become a strategic priority in many institutions (Bell and Brooks 2018), improvements to overall feedback practices are often constrained by such factors as institutional policies, high teacher workloads, and departmental and discipline cultures (Henderson 2017). In considering overall feedback practices, amongst continuing concerns is the recognition that, if feedback is to have any effect, learners need to use it as a tool for learning and apply it to improve their work. This recognition has led to a growing understanding that learners may not necessarily have the capabilities to make productive use of feedback. Consequently, the case for developing students' appreciation of the role of feedback and their capacity to strongly engage with feedback as a tool for learning is well established (Hounsell 2008; Evans 2013; Merry, Price, Carless, and Taras 2013; Molloy and Boud 2013a; Kreber, Anderson, Entwistle, and McArthur 2014).

'Feedback literacy' has entered the lexicon of higher education relatively recently to encapsulate these capacities and dispositions (Sutton and Gill 2010; Sutton 2012; Carless 2016; Carless and Boud 2018). While 'feedback' is often equated with information given to students on the quality of their work, a more complex conception of feedback underpins feedback literacy, incorporating interactions between students, peers and teachers as students seek to understand and apply the meaning and implications for their work of information coming from a range of sources (Carless and Boud 2018; Dawson et al. 2019). While recent higher education literature has begun to elaborate on the nature of feedback literacy, delineating the qualities required for its effective application, and suggesting how it might be developed in students (Winstone and Nash 2019), the role of the student as an active *elicitor* of feedback information is only recently being recognised as an essential element (Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2019).

The eliciting of feedback has a much longer history outside education. The term 'feedback seeking behaviour' was coined in the early 1980s to capture the practice of employees proactively seeking feedback in their organisation – 'actively attending to evaluations from others and directly seeking verbal appraisals of their behavior' quite apart from formal performance appraisals by line managers (Ashford and Cummings 1983, 370). This fundamental shift in perspectives on feedback recasts the employee from passive recipient to active seeker, moving the focus of feedback from the organisation as giver to the individual employee as seeker, from the formal to the informal, and from management-led processes to processes under employee control. The resulting feedback information was valued not for its own sake but rather as a resource for improving one's work. Feedback seeking behaviour now has an extensive literature, principally in management and organisational studies, in which feedback seeking is recognised as a complex process involving personal qualities of the seeker, perceived qualities of potential feedback providers, a range of contextual variables, factors that could affect feedback reception, and the outcomes of feedback (Anseel et al. 2015; Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016). The term 'feedback seeking behaviour' in this article refers to this strand of organisational-focused research and literature, while 'feedback elicitation' is used to refer to students' practices of seeking feedback in higher education.

While the literature on feedback in higher education has come to advocate for a strong proactive role for students, it has not engaged strongly with feedback seeking behaviour studies, even when arguing for students taking greater responsibility for proactively seeking out feedback and recommending feedback seeking behaviour as a focus of inquiry (Evans 2013; Molloy and Boud 2013b), possibly reflecting the recency of interest in students' proactive eliciting of feedback and the apparently quite different context of organisational studies. Notable exceptions can be found in medical education where feedback seeking behaviour research has been applied to clinical workplace settings, though these settings are characterised as much by their organisational as their educational nature (Janssen and Prins 2007; Bok et al. 2013; Crommerlink and Anseel 2013; Pelgrim and Kramer 2013).

One recent higher education study in a non-clinical context that has effectively engaged with feedback seeking behaviour concepts is that of Leenknecht, Hompus and van der Schaaf (2019) who assume that feedback seeking behaviour research findings can be applied directly to students in higher education. The authors relate the construct of 'deep learning approaches' (following Biggs, Kember, and Leung 2001) to the core feedback seeking behaviour construct of 'goal orientation' — whether feedback is being sought to learn or to demonstrate competence — and the type of feedback seeking method used. The authors conclude that 'the construct of feedback seeking behaviour is applicable in higher education and we can learn from previous research done to (sic) feedback seeking behaviour in the professional context' and that a better understanding of feedback seeking by students 'can provide us with starting points in our search for instruments to promote students' feedback literacy' (Leenknecht, Hompus, and van der Schaff 2019, 1076). In a similar vein Evans, while not referring to feedback seeking behaviour work, hoped that 'it may be possible to identify those dimensions (of self-regulation) that have the most impact on the development of effective feedback-seeking and -using practice' and nominated students' effective feedback seeking behaviours as an important research focus (Evans 2013, 87).

The limited application of feedback seeking behaviour to higher education highlights a gulf between two strands of feedback work — feedback literacy in higher education and feedback seeking behaviour in organisations. This paper seeks to promote a better understanding of feedback literacy by drawing together these two strands. The feedback seeking behaviour literature offers frameworks and research findings that may illuminate and challenge, support or contradict, extend or redirect, emerging understandings of feedback literacy. It is anticipated that, by comparing and contrasting these strands, a more sophisticated discussion of feedback literacy and a greater conceptual clarity regarding the nature of feedback literacy and its key elements will emerge. The paper begins with an outline of the key elements of feedback literacy presented in recent literature. The field of feedback seeking behaviour is then systematically summarised, with attention being drawn to potential implications for feedback literacy. The paper concludes by highlighting the conceptual and research implications of feedback seeking behaviour findings for an emerging feedback literacy agenda.

The emergence of feedback literacy

Recent work on feedback literacy, defined by Carless and Boud as 'the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies' (Carless and Boud 2018, 1316), has sought to explicate the nature and function of feedback literacy and the qualities characterising the feedback literate student. Consequently, the concept of feedback literacy, building on feedback research and academic literacy studies, is becoming well established. While this literature has positioned students as

actively engaged recipients of and responders to feedback, their role as seekers or elicitors of feedback is only now emerging, as will be outlined in this section.

Sutton's contextually located definition of feedback literacy as 'the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback' (Sutton 2012, 31) was accompanied by a broader framework for understanding feedback literacy in terms of three dimensions, utilising Barnett and Coate's general schema for an engaged curriculum:

... an epistemological dimension, i.e. an engagement of learners in knowing (acquiring academic knowledge); an ontological dimension, i.e. an engagement of the self of the learner (investment of identity in academic work) [and] a practical dimension, i.e. an engagement of learners in acting (reading, thinking about, and feeding forward feedback). (Sutton 2012, 33; see also Barnett and Coate 2005)

Following this framework, Sutton and Gill (2012) note the socially situated meaning of feedback practice, the role of identity and the notable variation in students' experiences of feedback, including their conceptions of feedback, how tutor and student identities mediate feedback, and different forms of student engagement arising from different forms of power/knowledge relationships. While student agency is important, it operates in response to teacher comments and the concept of students eliciting feedback does not arise.

In contrast to this, Winstone and her colleagues introduced the term 'proactive recipience' to indicate a 'state' or 'activity' of active engagement in which feedback responsibility is shared between teacher and learner (Winstone, Nash, Parker, and Rowntree 2017). Student responsibility centres on four themes: *awareness* of the meaning and purpose of their feedback; *agency* to implement strategies for using feedback; *cognisance* of strategies for implementing feedback; and *volition* or willingness to scrutinise and use feedback (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, and Parker 2017). Learner engagement is seen to be dominated by dispositions that precede engagement: a commitment to change and readiness to engage with feedback; enthusiasm about and openness to receiving performance information; and a strong acknowledgment of the student's own responsibility for improvement. These dispositions are accompanied by an understanding of the purpose of feedback, training in using feedback, and skills of self-regulation. Relationship aspects of recipience are seen to include positive perceptions of the feedback giver and an absence of power imbalance. The capabilities underpinning agency and active recipience are located within Sutton's three dimensions of knowing, being and acting which provide a practical framework for feedback literacy development (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash 2019). However, this engagement begins with the receipt of feedback information; as noted in the work of Sutton and Gill, student initiative in proactively seeking feedback is not part of this schema.

Some writers are recognising a role for students in not only responding to and using, but also *seeking* feedback, though with limited elaboration. Carless, for example, listed 'activating the student role in *seeking*, generating, and using feedback' as the first step in developing dialogic feedback processes (Carless 2016, 5, emphasis added), while Carless and Boud include 'eliciting suggestions from peers or teachers' as a proactive step in managing affective aspects of the process (Carless and Boud 2018, 1319). Winstone and Carless are more explicit, stating that 'feedback is being reframed from something that teachers do, to a process where students are involved in *seeking*, processing, and using feedback information' (Winstone and Carless 2020, 5, emphasis added) and that 'the active positioning of students in eliciting and acting on comments is a fundamental principle of new paradigm feedback

practices' (78), though they do not elaborate on its nature or the elements or processes that may be involved.

A significant step towards eliciting feedback has been taken in the 'Learner Feedback Literacy Framework' of Molloy, Boud and Henderson (2019). The framework was validated through analysis of a large-scale survey focused on student experiences of feedback in formal assessment tasks. Students were asked, *inter alia*, whether they sought feedback from teaching staff prior to submitting work and whether they sought feedback from others after submission. The resulting framework explicitly includes feedback seeking, with 'elicits information to improve learning' as one of seven sets of qualities and actions typifying well developed feedback literacy (Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2019). The feedback literate student does not merely wait for feedback to be given but actively elicits it, considers a range of strategies and potential sources with different perspectives, and seeks out exemplars and cues from the environment regarding appropriate work. Such a student also exhibits certain qualities, including a commitment to feedback as improvement, appreciating feedback as an active process, and acknowledging the reciprocal nature of the feedback process.

The understanding of feedback literacy outlined in this section has emerged largely, though not exclusively, in response to formal feedback on formal assessment and has been typically framed as the capacity to receive, process and use information provided by others to improve one's work or learning. While the literature has tended to frame feedback literacy as applying once feedback information is received, recent work has identified factors that need to be in place prior to this – a state of 'pre-engagement' characterised by a commitment to or even enthusiasm for the feedback process, a sense of personal agency and responsibility, and a disposition and ability to *elicit* feedback. However, eliciting feedback has not been conceptualised in any detail so that the challenge issued by Evans and noted in the introduction – to identify critical dimensions of feedback seeking and make effective feedback seeking behaviours a research focus – remains. Moreover, the understanding of feedback literacy presented in this section is located in the field of education, with limited reference to feedback research and frameworks from outside education. Consequently, in the next section we step outside education to consider the specific understanding of feedback seeking in organisations and its relevance to feedback literacy in the quite different context of higher education.

'Feedback seeking behaviour' in organisations

The recognition of feedback seeking behaviour as a common practice in which employees proactively seek feedback quite separate from formal organisational processes heralded a major shift in the understanding of feedback in organisations. Shukla (2017) refers to feedback seeking behaviour as one of two prominent strands of research on workplace feedback since 1983, the other dealing with the effect of individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, locus of control, goal orientation and responsibility-taking on how more formal performance feedback is received.

Feedback seeking, defined as 'individuals' proactive search for evaluative information about their performance' (De Stobbeleir, Ashford, and Buyens 2011, 812), stands in contrast to the more passive receipt of information from others, typically from supervisors in formal performance appraisals. The understanding of feedback in feedback seeking behaviour parallels contemporary understandings of feedback in higher education. Both see feedback as information on performance, both locate this within a broader feedback process requiring action on the information to generate change, both emphasise the role of the highly active

recipient as the key to effective feedback processes, and both are responses to the perceived inadequacies of traditional practices involving more-or-less passive recipients (Ashford and Cummings 1983; Molloy and Boud 2013a).

Important points of difference also are apparent. Feedback seeking has been considered natural and almost ubiquitous in organisations while feedback literacy, including eliciting feedback, is seen as something not to be taken for granted and thus needing to be developed. Feedback seeking behaviour is totally seeker-initiated while feedback literacy has focused on dealing with feedback processes initiated by others. Feedback seeking behaviour is quite separate to formal appraisals while feedback literacy has been primarily (though not exclusively) positioned in relation to formal assessment. Importantly, as we will outline shortly, the outcomes sought by feedback seeking extend beyond the improved learning and work goals of feedback literacy.

Models and elements of feedback seeking behaviour

Recent models of feedback seeking behaviour (Crommerlink and Anseel 2013; Anseel et al. 2015; Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016; Shukla 2017) have built on the three core elements of earlier models: ‘antecedents’, methods and outcomes. ‘Antecedents’ refers to factors in place prior to feedback seeking episodes. These are seen to impact on feedback seeking methods which in turn lead to outcomes. Antecedents include (a) feedback seeker characteristics such as intentions, orientation to feedback and how seekers estimate the value of feedback compared to potential psychological and other costs of seeking it; (b) the perceived characteristics of potential providers of feedback, including their expertise, credibility and leadership style; and (c) contextual characteristics such as relationships, organisational culture, feedback environment, and structure and uncertainty in the workplace. Feedback seeking methods are characterised as ‘inquiry’ – actively asking others, or ‘monitoring’ – observing what is happening around one. Potential outcomes include learning, reassurance of being on the right track and enhanced perceptions of one’s work by others.

These core elements provide the foundation of feedback seeking behaviour research and the increasingly complex models which elaborate on them, the relationships between them, and factors that moderate or mediate individual engagement in feedback seeking.

In this section we will consider five factors of this framework that indicate the potential for feedback seeking behaviour research to inform an understanding of feedback literacy: the *antecedent* factors of seeker goal orientation, cost-value calculations of feedback seeking, and the desired qualities of potential feedback providers; the *feedback seeking methods* of inquiry and monitoring; and the potential *outcomes* of feedback seeking. Each factor is outlined according to the feedback seeking behaviour literature, followed by a short statement of its possible implications for feedback elicitation as part of feedback literacy in higher education.

(i) Goal orientation

Employees’ intentions in seeking feedback are seen as possibly the most important determinants of feedback seeking (VandeWalle 2003) as well as the most researched (Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016). Following Dweck (1999), intentions are framed in terms of ‘goal orientation’ where an individual with a ‘learning goal orientation’ will seek diagnostic feedback that will help them change, while a person with a ‘performance goal orientation’ will be more concerned with how they are seen by others and how they see themselves (Ashford et al. 2003; Ashford et al. 2016). The simple distinction is whether the individual is oriented towards *developing* or *demonstrating* ability (VandeWalle and Cummings 1997). The performance goal has been further divided into a ‘proving’ goal

orientation where the individual actively seeks to demonstrate competence and receive positive judgements of their work, and an ‘avoiding’ goal orientation where the goal is simply to avoid receiving negative judgements (VandeWalle 1997; Eliot and McGregor 2001). ‘Feedback orientation’ (London and Smithers 2002) is closely related to goal orientation. A high feedback orientation is associated with being more open to feedback, responding favourably to it, and valuing, seeking and using it more (Anseel et al. 2015, 321). The ‘feedback orientation scale’ (Linderbaum and Levy 2010) with its dimensions of ‘feedback utility’ (a belief that feedback is useful) and ‘social awareness’ (using feedback to ascertain others’ views of oneself) has been developed to measure this propensity. Goal orientation has also been related to types of feedback sought: ‘diagnostic’ - to improve work; ‘normative’ – to make comparisons to peers; ‘assurance’ – for self-validation; and ‘no feedback’ - where feedback is simply not sought (Park et al. 2007; Ashford et al. 2013).

Higher education feedback literature has focused on the goal of feedback being to improve learning and the quality of student work. Thus Molloy, Boud and Henderson’s previously cited framework implies a single, ‘learning’ orientation, emphasising themes of improvement and change. The framework’s items of ‘establishes a disposition to use feedback continually to improve their work’ and ‘acknowledges that mastery/expertise is not fixed, but can change over time and context’ (Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2019, 4) directly reflect the feedback seeking behaviour learning goal orientation and its Dweck-based foundation. The primacy of goal orientation in feedback seeking literature draws attention to the potentially determinative role of student intention in eliciting feedback. This literature also invites an exploration of non-learning goal orientations that may be present in students in particular contexts, the influence of intention on methods used to elicit feedback, and the kinds of feedback that might be sought by students.

(ii) Cost-value framework.

A cost-benefit or cost-value framework according to which employees consciously assess the costs and benefits or value of seeking feedback is seen as a key driver of subsequent feedback seeking behaviour (VandeWalle and Cummings 1997; VandeWalle et al. 2000; VandeWalle 2003; Anseel et al. 2015). Anseel et al. give the example of the relatively new employee experiencing some uncertainty about their environment and seeking feedback to reduce this, but not wanting to give a negative impression of concern or anxiety to new colleagues. Three kinds of cost have been noted: the ‘self-presentation cost’ of asking which may cause embarrassment; the ‘ego cost’ of possibly receiving negative news; and the ‘effort cost’ reflecting the amount of effort required in seeking feedback (VandeWalle 2003). The perception of costs and benefits may be influenced by goal orientation: learning-oriented individuals will place more value on benefits and be less concerned about costs than their performance-oriented colleagues (Anseel et al. 2015).

While feedback literacy recognises the importance of students’ awareness of the value of eliciting feedback, that costs may be involved has so far not been considered. A student might avoid seeking feedback from the person who might mark their final work in case they portray themselves as not competent. Another may be too busy with other work to afford the time required to seek, receive and act on feedback. Yet another might avoid feedback in group settings to avoid potential embarrassment. If a cost-value framework is present in higher education, an understanding of what cost and value factors are taken into account by students may help explain patterns of feedback eliciting behaviour in various contexts.

(iii) Qualities of potential feedback providers

Feedback seeking behaviour literature has paid particular attention to the qualities looked for in potential feedback providers, using the somewhat awkward term ‘target antecedents’ to denote their perceived characteristics (Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016). Credibility, sensitivity to feelings and a transformational leadership style (defined as one which is supportive and considers an individual’s needs) are seen to impact feedback seeking (VandeWalle et al. 2000; Anseel et al. 2015; Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016). Perceived characteristics may influence cost-value calculations: perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness and credibility may increase the perceived value of feedback; a transformational leadership style which supports while challenging the employee will reduce perceived costs; and a good relationship between the seeker and the source increases the likelihood of sensitive and constructive feedback and reduces the chances of a negative reaction (Anseel et al. 2015, 325).

In higher education, students eliciting feedback are not limited to their formal assessors as feedback providers. Potential providers could include family, friends, fellow students, student support staff such as learning advisors or personal tutors, and other teachers. In some contexts such as the performing arts and in clinical or field placements, a range of potential providers may be on hand in the form of teachers, practitioners and fellow workers. The range of potential providers may influence whom students might approach for feedback beyond formal processes or whether they seek such feedback at all. Some students may be aware of a range of possible providers and the qualities they seek in them and cultivate productive relationships with promising candidates. They may also be adept at seeking and managing feedback from providers considered less desirable.

(iv) Feedback-seeking methods

At the heart of feedback seeking behaviour are the two posited methods of seeking feedback: inquiry and monitoring. ‘Inquiry’ involves directly asking others for their perceptions or evaluations of one’s work or behaviour. ‘Monitoring’ occurs when, in the absence of explicit feedback from others, ‘individuals construct a system of cues to subjectively evaluate their performance’ (Ashford and Cummings 1983, 382). This involves employees observing what is happening around them, especially what others are doing, and interpreting this in light of their own goals. Monitoring can include ‘reflective appraisal’ of one’s own work and behaviour, and ‘comparative behaviour’ where the value of one’s own work is inferred by comparing it to the work of those around them (Ashford and Cummings 1983, 384). Surprisingly, the major reviews of feedback seeking research noted previously report very little on how feedback is actually sought. Anseel et al. do not include this central act of feedback seeking in their meta-analytic review, noting that ‘(u)nfortunately, for a large number of the antecedents and outcomes of interest the number of studies of inquiry and monitoring dimensions is too small for a meaningful assessment’ (Anseel et al. 2015, 334).

Molloy, Boud and Henderson’s Feedback Literacy Framework (Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2019) parallels feedback seeking behaviour methods by including both eliciting feedback from a wide range of others (inquiry) and seeking cues from the environment, the task, and exemplars (monitoring). Feedback literacy studies might learn from the relative lack of attention to methods in feedback seeking behaviour literature by paying more attention to these central practices, exploring the methods students use to elicit feedback, and considering what variation may occur between students and/or between contexts.

(v) Outcomes of feedback seeking behaviour

Outcomes of feedback seeking behaviour can be defined at two levels. At the first level 'referent information' indicates what is required for successfully functioning on the job, while 'appraisal information' tells the employee if he or she is functioning successfully (Ashford and Cummings 1983). At the second level are outcomes that can arise once such information has been received, processed and acted on and may include improved performance, reassurance that one is on the right track, better adjustment to new work settings, role clarity, and social integration into the workplace (Anseel et al. 2015; Ashford, De Stobbeleir, and Nujella 2016). Outcomes have received only limited attention in feedback seeking behaviour research, possibly due to the difficulties in theorising and researching outcomes given the complex range of factors that may potentially influence them (Ashford, De Stobbeleir and Nujella 2016). Anseel et al.'s finding of 'the lack of a strong relationship between overall feedback seeking behaviour and performance' in the literature possibly reflects this difficulty and the small number of outcomes-related studies in their review (Anseel et al. 2015, 337).

In higher education, the desired outcome of feedback is usually defined in terms of improved work or learning strategies (see, eg, Carless and Boud 2018). Feedback seeking behaviour research suggests the possibility of other outcomes for students, including confirmation that one is on the right track, functioning successfully and adjusting well to any new student role. Feedback outcomes research in higher education may be as problematic as it is in organisations. We note Evans' observation that '(t)he lack of a learning effect is an important area to explore' while highlighting the challenges of doing so since '(a)acceptance and use of feedback is complicated' with multiple mediator variables interacting in unclear ways (Evans 2013, 95).

This section has outlined five key factors in feedback seeking behaviour studies, namely the *antecedent factors* of goal orientation, cost-value calculations, and the desired qualities of potential feedback providers; the *feedback seeking methods* of inquiry and monitoring; and the potential *outcomes* of feedback seeking. The potential implications of these factors for students' elicitation of feedback have been noted, including the role of intentions in eliciting feedback, students' cost-value calculations, desired provider qualities, monitoring the environment as a feedback source, and an expanded range of outcomes. These factors indicate the relevance of feedback seeking behaviour studies to our understanding of students' elicitation of feedback. Other factors may be equally worthy of attention, including the roles of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and resilience in mediating feedback seeking behaviours.

Discussion

Initial conceptions of feedback literacy (including Barnett and Coate's ontological, epistemological and practice dimensions outlined by Sutton, the proactive recipience and agentic engagement of Winstone, Nash, Parker and Rowntree, and Carless and Boud's four features of feedback literacy) stopped short of recognising the critical role of students in initiating the feedback process through their own seeking of feedback independent of teacher actions. While the recent feedback literacy framework of Molloy, Boud and Henderson has begun to address this by including 'elicits information to improve learning' as one of seven characteristics of well-developed feedback literacy, none of this literature has acknowledged the now extensive literature on feedback seeking behaviour in organisations. Consequently we have considered five factors that feature prominently in feedback seeking behaviour studies and have set out a *prime facie* case for their relevance to feedback literacy. However,

we do not assume that feedback seeking behaviour findings can be applied to student feedback elicitation without careful consideration of several factors.

The first of these is that feedback literacy and feedback seeking behaviour have arisen in quite different contexts with not only different concerns and foci but also different worldviews and methodological traditions. Feedback seeking behaviour studies are concerned with feedback that is separate from formal, organisationally prescribed practices. Feedback seeking behaviour studies have focused on factors that influence seekers' approaches to feedback and have paid limited attention to what happens at the point of engagement with feedback, how it is processed, how it is used and what outcomes arise from it. Feedback literacy is also concerned with approaches to feedback but is equally concerned with how feedback is received, processed and responded to. While it encompasses informal feedback processes, it also addresses students' capacities to optimise learning from feedback in formal assessment. Formal feedback in organisations occurs in regular performance appraisals, with feedback seeking behaviour standing quite apart from this. For students, teacher-led feedback occurs frequently through formative and summative assessment and may be so dominant as to diminish the apparent need or desire for student elicited feedback. This dominance may be supported by the convention that feedback only occurs in association with formal assessment tasks. While there are important differences, feedback seeking behaviour and feedback literacy share some common foundations. Both are highly focused on the recipient, placing the receiver at the centre of the feedback process and exercising a high level of agency. Both see feedback as a resource that needs to be used if it is to be meaningful and both locate feedback within complex organisational and interpersonal contexts. These factors suggest that students' elicitation of feedback and employees' feedback seeking in organisations are related but somewhat different phenomena.

Secondly, feedback contexts within higher education may vary considerably, whether between undergraduate and higher degree research studies, between academic and placement settings, between disciplines, and within disciplines. The contextual influences on feedback practices are both powerful and complex (Ajjawi et al. 2017).

Thirdly, while feedback seeking behaviour has been the focus of extensive research since Ashford and Cummings seminal 1983 article, empirical research on student feedback elicitation is embryonic. In spite of feedback seeking behaviour's long history, Anseel et al. warn that 'we should be careful that consensus on antecedents and outcomes of feedback seeking behaviour is based on robust empirical results instead of implicit notions about what is believed to be true' (Anseel et al. 2015, 319). It is equally important that claims about student elicitation of feedback are subjected to ongoing research. While it is tempting to directly apply feedback seeking behaviour concepts and findings to feedback literacy, we do not assume that this is appropriate. Separate research is required into the presence and nature of feedback elicitation to establish an understanding of this phenomenon in higher education, though feedback seeking behaviour research does suggest a fertile field of further research. Each of the feedback seeking behaviour factors considered in the previous section could inform a research agenda on aspects feedback elicitation. Examples of research questions prompted by feedback seeking behaviour findings are presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1]

This paper has paid particular attention to qualities of feedback seekers in organisations and student agency in eliciting feedback in higher education. While the characteristics of seekers or elicitors of feedback play crucial roles in feedback processes, the role of contextual factors and the nature of feedback literacy as a social practice must be borne in mind in considering

the relevance of feedback seeking behaviour findings. Sutton (2012) pointed to the social relations of teaching and learning as enabling or constraining the development of feedback literacy in general, while more recently Henderson, Ryan and Phillips (2019) identified individual capacity as only one of three major themes in higher education feedback challenges, the others being feedback practices and contextual constraints. Similarly, Anseel et al. (2015) have argued the need for research into the interaction between individual and situational antecedent factors in predicting feedback seeking decisions, without assuming that contexts are merely constraining rather than supportive. While feedback elicitation research can learn from feedback seeking behaviour studies of individual characteristics, equal attention should be paid to feedback seeking behaviour studies focused on feedback seeking as a highly contextualised social practice.

Conclusion

While several higher education writers have commended feedback seeking and the student practice of eliciting feedback has been recognised empirically, our understanding of this phenomenon in higher education is embryonic. Moreover, this understanding has been developed in the context of higher education studies and has paid only limited attention to a considerable body of literature developed in the related field of feedback seeking behaviour in organisations. With a growing recognition of the role of students in actively eliciting feedback from a range of sources and with feedback seeking behaviour research beginning to be applied in higher education contexts, this paper has established a *prima facie* case for a more detailed consideration of how feedback seeking behaviour concepts and frameworks might further our understanding of student elicitation of feedback. Equally importantly, this paper has drawn attention to feedback seeking practices that exist apart from formal evaluation processes, thereby highlighting feedback elicitation as a potentially rich field of exploration in higher education. Moreover, if feedback seeking behaviour is an important workplace practice, higher education practices that value and support feedback elicitation may make also enhance student employability.

This paper has drawn attention to five specific feedback seeking behaviour concepts that might further such understanding in relation to students' goals or intentions in eliciting feedback, the methods they might employ, their perceptions of costs and benefits, the qualities sought in feedback providers, and the issues of desired and actual outcomes – while also noting the possible mediating function of individual characteristics such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. An indicative list of research questions addressing these concepts and characteristics has been proposed. While feedback seeking behaviour concepts and frameworks are instructive in themselves, it is important to ensure that evolving understandings of students' elicitation of feedback are based on robust research in the higher education context. It is equally important to acknowledge the limitations arising from feedback seeking behaviour's focus on individual behaviour in organisations while feedback, feedback literacy, and feedback elicitation in higher education are increasingly construed as social practices.

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Table 1. Feedback elicitation research questions

Aspect of feedback elicitation	Research questions
The presence and nature of eliciting feedback	What does 'eliciting feedback' mean in higher education? How common is it? In what circumstances does it occur? How do practices vary across contexts?
Intentions/goals	How might the FEEDBACK SEEKING BEHAVIOUR concepts of goal orientation and orientation to feedback apply to students eliciting feedback? Do students have goals other than learning? How do they conceive of learning goals? What implications might different orientations have for eliciting feedback?
Cost-value	Do students use a cost-value framework in deciding whether to seek feedback? If so, what cost and value considerations are involved?
Sources of feedback	What factors influence students' choice of feedback sources? What role does a transformational leadership style and perceptions of trustworthiness and credibility play in encouraging eliciting feedback?
Methods of eliciting feedback	What methods do students use to elicit feedback? Do the methods of inquiry and monitoring apply? Are other methods used?
Outcomes	What kinds of feedback inputs result from elicitation? What changes, if any, in learning, work or self-perception result?
Contextual and social factors	How does feedback elicitation vary across study contexts (eg undergraduate/doctoral or face-to-face/remote)? Do current feedback practices encourage or inhibit students' sense of belonging, confidence and personal agency in their student role?