

EMOTIONS IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *At the heart of any workplace behavior (and not only), there are always one or more emotions (pleasant/unpleasant, partially controllable/uncontrollable, aware/unconscious, useful/useless/harmful, intense/less intense, predictable/unpredictable, expressed/ repressed, observable/ unobservable, explained/ unexplained, rational/irrational, and so on). Emotions are the foundation of a complex and mysterious mechanism of action and behavior. Emotions are triggered by certain things, people, events, situations, processes, results, interactions and so on, and are informed by a variety of endogenous (biological) and exogenous factors, and also by the intellectual potential of each individual. Emotions lie at the intersection of mind (rationality), body (physical) and soul (spirit), thought, reason, logic, compassion, autonomy and action/behavior, individual and environment. This article undertakes to define emotions and identify their impact on the organizational environment, with emphasis on emotional climate and managing emotions. Moreover, we will focus on human behavior/action, rather than on the evolution of the nervous system or the cortex in particular. Work itself should not be a source of suffering. It is obvious that certain emotions cause bad moods, unnecessary and even harmful ones, conditions that should be considered, even if they have a situational and subjective character. Some managers think that the decision-maker fulfills his/her duties by strictly conforming to the law and to the agreement clauses and by meeting his/her obligations in a timely and exacting manner. Others believe that a good leader, in addition to observing the applicable rules and regulation, must be honest also to his colleagues and collaborators and sympathetic to the needs, ideas and emotions of those who are interested in the optimal operation of the company. Managers must remain alert to events, people and behaviors that can trigger harmful emotions within the organization. Employees should be encouraged to express their emotions in order to avoid tense situations. Even though tensions may occur, they must be managed effectively because, as we all know, avoiding a war does not mean peace, just as avoiding unnecessary inconveniences does not always equal pleasure. The improvement of emotional behavior represents a competitive edge in business activities for any organization. The main target of this undertaking is to provide a certain perspective on emotion; to be more specific, we are concerned with discovering the circumstances and causes that trigger off emotions in organizational environments. Theoretical approaches conveyed in this article may be perceived as a call to mindfulness and to the managers' awareness as to the importance of improving the emotional climate of the workplace.*

Keywords: emotions; organizational environment; emotional climate.

JEL classification: D21, D83, J28, M12, M14.

1. General Introduction

As Rimé (2005) suggests, humanity has no other means to safeguard and preserve its constructs than *individual emotions*. The idea that the individual is hard-wired to have affects, possessing an emotionally viable organism, was proposed by Darwin. He also proposed that affects are useful, because they help the organism adapt to various vital situations.

We are aware that the discussion on the basic meaning of the concept of “emotion” as a trigger of human behavior might go on forever, given the multitude of scientific fields that operate with this concept (psychoanalysis, medical science, psychobiology, psychology, psychophysiology, organizational theory, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc.).

Turner (2010: 169) argues that sociology cannot fully understand human cognition, behavior, interaction, and social organization without a theory of emotions that drive all social processes. Workplace communication is not entirely rational, but influenced by an array of experiences/logical information pertaining to previous interactions (with the same individual or concerning a similar problem/situation etc.) and also by emotional memory (i.e. memories related to experienced emotional states, remembered states of affect).

2. A sneak peek into defining and characterizing emotions

In Rimé’s opinion (2005), the term “emotion” is recent and its early significance was basically related to collective behavior (for instance, “a certain emotion seized the crowds”). However, in Larousse’s definition of emotion (1870), the concept of “excitation, disturbance of animal economy” gained pre-eminence over the concept of “commotion that moves masses into action”. The Oxford dictionary (1933) traced back several key historical occurrences of the concept: in 1579, signifying “social commotion”, in 1600, denoting a “commotion or disturbance of the spirit”, in 1603, signifying a “migration, a transfer from place to place” and finally, in 1690, signifying “physical movement, commotion or disturbance” in John Locke’s writings (Rimé, 2005).

From a cognitive point of view, the concept of emotion includes an instigating/generating event, an interpretation of the latter and a consequent evaluation of this interpretation that determines a physiological change in the organism and a state of preparedness for action (Power and Dalgleish, 1998). The following aspects must be therefore taken into account: the occurrence of an event, the perception of its consequences, the consequent interpretation and assessment, the occurrence of a physiological change within the organism and the preparedness for action.

The definition proposed by Keltner and Gross (1999) integrates previous conceptions regarding the biological and social determinism of emotions, that are regarded as biologically based episodic patterns of perception, experience, physiology, action and communication of relatively short duration, that occur as a response to specific challenges and opportunities of physical and social nature.

As Cosnier (1994) shows, emotions, defined as states of preparedness and activation of largely innate behavior systems, that are also influenced by learning and training, belong to the category of *major motivational states* that generate orientated states of tension (tendencies to act, defined by their purposes and results). Emotions are primed response structures that intervene automatically

during the process of adaptation (Rimé, 2005).

In specialist literature, emotional response structures are defined in terms of vernacular language: fear, sadness, anger, disgust/contempt, amazement, shame, guilt, joy, surprise.

In Rimé's opinion (2005), states of affect include, apart from *emotions* (marked by quick induction, transience and discontinuity within the individual-environment relationship), a series of *non-emotional* manifestations of affect (that are less intense, less differentiated and more diffuse), such as:

- ↳ *Moods*: that may last from a few minutes to several weeks.
- ↳ *Temperament*: highly stable features of affect, that tends to persist for one's whole life.
- ↳ *Emotional disturbances*: syndromes that may last for several weeks or several years (depression, anger, phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders, panic attacks).
- ↳ *Preferences*: positive or negative manifestations of affect that constantly accompany one's dealings with objects, situations and people (attraction and rejection).
- ↳ *Affects*: diffuse incipient emotional manifestations, *positive* (hope, exhilaration, exaltation) or *negative* surges of affect (anguish, sadness, grudge) that do not qualify as emotions, as they lack discontinuity (unlike emotions).

Scholars recognize that emotions are distinct from attitudes (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2004) and suggest that emotions influence attitudes (Steenhaut and Kenhove, 2006) (in Agnihotri et al., 2012: 246).

Moreover, for Cosnier (1994), daily affective manifestations are interactional micro-emotions, conversational (phasic) affects, if they do not leave lasting (medium or long-term) impressions in the memory or have a lower intensity.

In his work, Ekman (1992) lists 9 features of basic emotions: (1) *the universality of emotional signals*: the expression of basic emotions is universally recognized (there are, however, certain subtleties that depend on culture and on the specific type of emotion); (2) the presence of *comparable expressions* between man and other primates (for instance, fear, anger, sadness and joy); (3) each emotion is based on *a specific physiological context*: it seems that there are certain specific schemes that describe the actuation of the autonomous nervous system, that have been verified at least for anger, fear, disgust and sadness; (4) *the universality of triggering events*: the generating situations share commonalities, i.e. a certain type of vital situations and challenges elicits specific reactions; (5) *the coherence of emotional reactions*: generally speaking, there is a congruence between the emotional experience and its expression; (6) *quick triggering*: physiological reactions may occur in a fraction of a second and mimic, within milliseconds; (7) *limited duration*; (8) *automatic perception mechanism*: emotions occur out of a sudden – they are neither voluntary, nor logical; (9) *spontaneous occurrence*: an emotional experience is not a deliberate choice, and that's because of the quick succession, the automatic perception and the involuntary expressive reactions.

For a large number of contemporary authors, only the "basic" or "primary" emotions (fear, happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, distress, shame, etc., whose number ranges between 4 to 10, according to each expert's own opinion) and the derivatives that result from combining the former count as emotions.

In Turner's view (2010: 176) there are at least four primary emotions: satisfaction-happiness, aversion-fear, assertion-anger, and disappointment-sadness. More than that, the author explains the variations in these primary emotions from their low-intensity to their high-intensity manifestations.

Clark (2013) distinguishes two classes of emotions, namely:

1. *Basic emotions* (such as fear, joy, and anger): these are seen to be evolutionarily old sets of responses involving stereotypical neural, physiological, and behavioral profiles that have evolved in response to recurrent evolutionary challenges (capable of being activated by unconditioned stimuli and leading to unconditioned, involuntary responses that cannot be easily modified by higher cognition).
2. *Higher cognitive emotions* (such as pride, shame, and guilt): these are held to necessarily involve sophisticated cognitive inputs by their very nature (such as means-end, causal, and counterfactual reasoning, long-term planning, social cognition, etc.), and to lack simple noncognitive elicitors; these emotions do not involve involuntary, stereotypical physiological, expressive, or behavioral responses, but rather involve responses that are learned or prescribed by the social environment.

Many, if not all emotions have both basic and higher cognitive forms that share all of the paradigmatic features of emotions according to Clark (2013: 74): while higher cognitive and basic forms do indeed differ in important ways, they can nevertheless be placed in a common evolutionary and developmental framework.

3. Emotions' impact in the organizational environment

As far as the organizational environment is concerned, Brief and Weiss (2002) showed that the 30s set the foundation of the studies concerning the emotional life of employees, with work satisfaction as a pre-eminent object of research. According to Weiss and Brief (2001), one particularly influential study on the emotions of employees was conducted in 1932 by Hersey, who came to the following conclusions: there is a clear relationship between daily emotional experience and work performance; the daily emotional experience (although variable over time) shows well-defined cycles; the effects of negative emotional states are more pronounced than the positive effects of positive emotional states; both work-related and external factors (e.g., family life) have an impact and are relevant in enabling the employee's emotional adjustment to the work environment. Therefore, employees do not interpret and evaluate the situations in an abstract manner, isolated from the social, organizational and relational context in which they are experienced.

Rietti (2009) examines some reasons why moral, social, and political philosophers should be concerned about emotion-work and what it tells us about the nature of emotions and their moral, social, and political significance, and especially, their significance for agency and the relationships and interactions between agents. Emotion-work has fundamental impact both on agency and on well-being, both for those who do the work and for those around them: and for that reason alone, value theorists would do well to pay attention (Rietti, 2009: 57).

People have been shown to use feelings as information. The ease with which information comes to mind – i.e. how accessible it is - guides people's inferences about their moods, emotions, metacognitive experiences, and bodily sensations (Schwarz, 2012).

Emotions are aroused under two general conditions: (1) expectations and (2) sanctions. In all encounters embedded within mesostructures and macrostructures, individuals have expectations about what should and will transpire (Turner, 2010: 186):

- ↳ When these expectations are realized, individuals will experience satisfaction and more intense degrees of happiness, when they are exceeded.
- ↳ When individuals receive positive sanctions for their actions, they will feel satisfaction or perhaps a more intense form of happiness.
- ↳ If individuals fail to realize expectations and/or receive negative sanctions, they will experience negative emotions.

The distinguishing feature of emotional versus non-emotional states (passions, feelings, affects, preferences, moods, sensations etc.) is the discontinuity within the interaction between employee and organizational environment. The virtually infinite number of conditions that facilitate such discontinuities is clustered around two poles:

1. *Variations that pertain to the organizational environment*: the impact of strategies, plans, targets, tasks, events, phenomena, processes, physical or social circumstances etc.
2. *Variations that pertain to the employee*: the dynamics of needs, wants, reasons, ideals, dreams, goals, individual objectives, interests, concepts, beliefs, certainties, values, desires etc.

In order to avoid shocks, any variation that occurs at one pole must find adequate supporting resources at the opposite pole. To be more specific, when the management is about to implement certain changes, it should make sure that the employees will find the personal internal resources needed to handle such changes successfully. If such resources are insufficient, the continuity is endangered. In this case, the individual should reorganize his priorities in terms of motives (needs, expectations etc.), by resorting to cognitive-symbolic means.

As noticed above, the individual is the one who has to either find the resources needed to adapt to the changes in his environment or abandon his new needs, wants, intentions etc. in order to continue his relation with the environment (if he chooses to). In our opinion, however, emotions are not mere responses of individuals to unexpected variations/situations in the external environment, but transitory states by means of which a positive relationship between individual and environment is constantly adjusted/ rebalanced.

Just like any other resources distributed by institutions, emotions have a tendency to compound their effects: positive emotions provide the energy to gather resources in many domains, whereas negative emotions in one domain will often work against securing resources in others (Turner, 2010: 175).

The positive effects of encouraging the expression of emotion at the workplace are: enabling self-understanding; stimulating feed-back; improvement of both intellectual (cognitive) and emotional skills; developing and maintaining optimal relationships within the organizational environment, with a positive impact on enthusiasm, loyalty, attachment, involvement etc.

In Huy's opinion (2011: 1406), many executives continue to believe that affective neutrality and focus on tasks are the best ways to deal with emotional situations. So, they avoid discussing emotions at work and understanding their causes.

The possible negative effects of the failure to express emotions (of those unpleasant ones, that generate stress, in particular) are: a counterproductive (tense, stressful) work climate; the impairment of the employees' mental skills; the impairment of the employees' social and emotional capacity; the discouragement of immediate feedback; the dehumanization of the organizational communication process; the decline of workplace creativity etc.

All this negative aspects may determine reactions that any organization tries to avoid: physical/verbal aggression at the workplace, hostility, threats, negative feelings towards the organization, resistance to change, sabotage, revenge, decline of trust, negative self-perception, negative perception of the others, escalation of interpersonal conflicts, the decline of labor quality and quantity, the increase of personnel fluctuation, labor union actions that may lead to violence etc.

As far as the relationship between workplace, the experienced emotions and the associated behaviors are concerned, Van Katwyk et al. (2000) have discovered significant correlations between negative emotions experienced within the organization and a series of factors with stress potential (the volume of work, interpersonal conflicts, organizational constraints). Judge et al. (2006) have examined the correlation between hostility, workplace attitudes and deviance in the context of a dynamic approach to the role of emotions, such as the one provided by the theory of emotional events and discovered that interpersonal justice and hostility are significant predictive factors of deviant conduct within the organization. Tepper et al. (2006) remind us that people perceive a state of procedural injustice when they are denied the right to opinion or when the representatives of the organization behave disrespectfully during resource allocation. Tepper et al. (2007) show that victims of management abuse experience a high level of stress that indicates disturbances involving dysfunctional thoughts and emotions (anxiety, anger, depression, emotional exhaustion).

In a recent study, Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013: 47) explain that the results of their analyses were consistent with the perspective that surface acting emotion regulation strategies show a pattern of negative relationships with labor outcomes such as job satisfaction and stress/exhaustion (but not with job performance itself), whereas deep acting emotion regulation strategies show a pattern of positive relationships with all of these work outcomes.

3. Emotional climate and managing emotions

As there is a growing pressure on employees to display their loyalty, commitment or even their identification with their employers, the emotional "climate" of workplaces has come under enhanced scrutiny lately (Kunda and Van Maanen, 1999).

The concept of climate has been used extensively in organizational psychology in an attempt to capture important differences in organizational environments. While an emotional climate may often be labeled by using names for emotions, such as joy and fear, we may also use labels that directly refer to the emotional relationships that are involved, such as hostility or solidarity (de Rivera, 1992).

The emotional climate is part of the organizational culture that affects everyone in the organization and refers to the quality of the organizational environment and the dominant relations and behaviors (how the employees emotionally relate to one another). Concentrating on the emotional climate of the nation-state, de Rivera (1992) referred to some of the different climates that have been reported in past

investigations: a climate of fear; a climate of security; a climate of instability; a climate of confidence or optimism (and their opposites, lack of confidence, pessimism, or "depression"); a climate of dissatisfaction; a climate of hostility; a climate of solidarity; a climate of hope.

Workplace emotional climate includes the whole of the employees' purely emotional reactions in relation to the organizational environment and culture: management style, labor conditions, relations between employees, communication climate, organization targets, work climate, change processes, external relations etc.

Emotions determine (even in the organizational environment) emotional/subjective experiences, cognitive alterations, psychological changes with an impact on the neurovegetative system, behavioral changes (verbal, non-verbal, paraverbal) and specific action drives (flight/escape, rejection, aggression etc.).

Every organization management should be concerned with encouraging the expression of emotion that strengthen and maintain a favorable/efficient emotional climate (for instance, a climate of security (trust, openness), stability, confidence, optimism, satisfaction, hope, solidarity). An unfavorable/inefficient emotional climate within the organizational environment (depression, instability, pessimism, fear, dissatisfaction, hostility, despair) shouldn't be ignored, because it may bring about both short-term and long-term harm. However, this doesn't imply that the repression of unpleasant emotions that lead to the instauration of the hostile climate should be encouraged.

Negative emotions are painful and, hence, will be often repressed. And, once defense mechanisms are activated, the repressed emotion will often transmute into a new emotion or set of emotions (they also become more intense) that change people's perceptions and propensities for action (Turner, 2010: 176).

Rietti (2009) explains why we seek to regulate emotions (our own/other people's emotions):

- ↳ Emotions convey information, both to oneself and to others, and as such, they can - and typically do - act as communications.
- ↳ Emotions act as incentives and disincentives - given the fact that emotions are perceived or even recalled as either pleasant or unpleasant, they also have more directly hedonic experiential aspects.
- ↳ Both the communicative and the hedonic aspects are subject to norms over which individuals have different degrees of control - and emotional labor conditions do not need to favor all equally.

Communication by means of emotions is faster and more subtle than verbal communication and, although its inner workings remain elusive, it can be highly beneficial in business or organizations (Goleman, 2002). In the process of communication, the message is conveyed together with the emotions of the sender. It is however true that there may be differences between intended and unintended emotions, and also between the intended and the received message.

It would be unwise for managers to simply presume that employees will always be genuine in their emotions while also displaying the appropriate mood. Instead, employee training for high emotional labor jobs should probably encourage deep acting over surface acting, and managers themselves should be trained to anticipate and proactively prevent episodes where employees may "break character" (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013: 80).

Managing emotions is most often presented in studies concerning emotional intelligence. For instances, Mayer and Salovey (1997) have designed a four branch model of emotional intelligence: (1) perception, assessment and expression of emotions; (2) emotional enablement of thinking; (3) understanding and analysis of emotion and the use of emotional knowledge; (4) managing emotions for emotional and intellectual development. In the authors' opinion, managing emotions requires the following abilities: being equally open to pleasant and unpleasant emotions; deliberate engagement with or detachment from a specific emotion, depending of its value; conscious monitoring of emotions towards oneself and the others; the ability to manage emotions by attenuating negative emotions and intensifying positive ones.

Analyzing the organizational domain of emotions, Fineman (2001) believes that, while this doesn't necessarily qualify as actual full-fledged "control", organizations tend to incorporate emotion control schemes and that the process itself involves emotional experiences. The authors also shows that the desirable or undesirable character of emotional expression is regulated by means of explicit rules issued and enforced by authority agents or in an informal, discrete manner, through socialization and organizational "rituals".

Beyer and Niño (2001) make reference to 5 ways in which organizational culture shapes the emotional experiences of the employees: (1) through the management of the anxiety generated by the uncertainty inherent to the dynamics of social, economic, organizational life; (2) by providing opportunities and ways (spaces, codes of conduct) to express emotions; (3) by encouraging and discouraging the expression of emotion; (4) by instilling identification and commitment; (5) by inculcating ethnocentrism.

Seo and Barrett (2007) suggested an alternative approach organizations could adopt towards feelings: fostering the freedom of managers/employees to experience and express their emotions to maximize the positive outcomes of those feelings, while simultaneously helping them minimize the emotions' potential negative impacts (in Huy, 2011: 1406).

In Huy's opinion (2011: 1406), managers can also increase their emotional self-awareness by acquiring a richer vocabulary of emotions, by understanding the causes and consequences of various emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, pride and joy so they can recognize/regulate them, and express them to others in an articulated way.

5. Conclusion

With the acknowledgment of the emotions' role at the workplace, specialist literature produced an impressive amount of studies and research on the negative or positive nature of the emotion's impact on attitudes and behavior within an organization.

Just as we people manage more or less successfully to repress/eliminate/ignore emotions/consequences we deem unpleasant/inefficient and to be open to emotions that are pleasant and bolster our performance effectively, on the other hand, so should organizations concern themselves with securing an emotionally intelligent environment. As Goleman et al. (2002) show, research has revealed three useful key ideas for creating a resonant, emotionally intelligent and effective culture: (1) the discovery of emotional reality, (2) the visualization of ideal and (3) the fostering of emotional intelligence.

Unfortunately, some organizations are not alien to various forms of physical (physical violence, exposure to situations that may endanger one's life etc.) and emotional abuse (verbal aggression, insult, offence, blame, instilment of guilt, inequitable treatment, withdrawal of support or threats with withdrawal of support for an individual in a relevant situation, various forms of justified or unjustified penalty, immoral conduct, abusive/ambiguous conduct of managers and supervisors, lack of respect, public humiliation etc.). In order to eliminate such dehumanizing behaviors it is important to accept and encourage the expression of unpleasant emotions felt by those who were afflicted by these treatments, in spite of any risk or costs that might be involved. Due to space limitations, in this article we did not consider thoroughly the risks and costs associated with the emotions' excessive manifestation in the organizational environment. This will be the focus of our further research.

The perception of emotion by the employees at the workplace cannot be prevented or averted. On the other hand, the employees can learn how to adjust their emotional reactions to achieve good communication within the organization.

People that experience unpleasant emotions may receive social support in the form of *emotional* (listening, positive affects, attachment, patience, availability, respect, consideration, appreciation, care, empathy, etc.), *informational* (messages, advice, opinions, reassuring information, solutions, indications, etc.) and *instrumental* support (material aid/services for relief, rest and mood improvement). Employees are able to learn the emotion expression regulation/codes (accepted/endorsed expressions), if the organization culture is one that allows and encourages the expression of emotions and stress reactions by the employees. They will be able to make better use of those emotions or emotional expressions that best ensure their security and the achievement of their targets.

Emotional workplace behavior encouragement and assessment schemes may include a set of implicit and/or explicit, written and/or spoken rules for an adequate emotional conduct, designed and implemented in way that helps people guide their conduct, enabling or inhibiting certain emotional expressions.

Perhaps the most important takeaway is that future studies should not neglect the role of dispositional affect in the emotional labor process (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013: 72).

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