Research on Emotion in Organizations

VOLUME 17

Emotions and Negativity

Ronald H. Humphrey
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Editors

EMOTIONS AND NEGATIVITY

RESEARCH ON EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

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CONTENTS

Dedicated to former series editors Wilfred J. Zerbe and Charmine E. J. Härtel who have contributed so greatly to the Emonet group since the beginning in 1998, including cochairing 11 Emonet conferences and coediting no less than 19 conference-based edited volumes. The success of the Emonet group and the REOM book series largely reflects their energy and dedication. Thanks guys!

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Ashlea C. Troth is a Professor in Organizational Behavior at the Griffith Business School, Griffith University. Her areas of research expertise are in emotional intelligence and regulation, communication, and performance. Ashlea's work has been published in leading international journals and has been awarded funding from the Australian Research Council to examine emotional intelligence and regulation in the workplace.

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INTRODUCTION: EMOTIONS AND NEGATIVITY

Ronald H. Humphrey, Neal M. Ashkanasy and Ashlea C. Troth

ABSTRACT

Purpose: *This introduction sets the stage for the book theme, "Emotions and Negativity," by reviewing the early work on negative emotions and by discussing the impact of the COVID pandemic on people's moods and emotions. It discusses how most of the chapters in this book were first presented as conference papers at the* Twelfth International Conference on Emotions and Worklife ("Emonet XII"). *It then highlights the key contributions from each of the chapters.*

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: *This gives an overview of the organizational structure of the book and explains the four major parts of the book. It then relates each chapter to the theme of each part and discusses the key contributions of each chapter.*

Findings: *The introduction concludes by observing that the chapters offer a variety of practical solutions to negative emotions that should be of use to both practitioners and academicians.*

Originality/Value: *The chapters investigate underresearched topics, and thus make original and important new contributions. Although underresearched, the topics they explore have a major impact on people's lives. Thus, these chapters add considerable value to the field.*

Keywords: Emotions; negativity; book overview; chapter summaries; practical solutions; value statement

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In the last year (2020), we have seen the world beset by anxiety and fear as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the globe. Thus, it is fitting that this year's theme for Volume 17 of the series *Research on Emotion in Organizations* is on the topic "Emotions and Negativity." It has long been recognized that negative emotions can be a disruptive force in the workplace. Indeed, the father of the early theory about bureaucracy, Max Weber, argued that these negative emotions interfered with administrative rationality, and thus that *all* emotions should be suppressed (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Weber argued further that bureaucracy flourishes (reprinted with English translation in 1968, p. 75):

> … the more it is "dehumanized," the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation.

Morgan (1986; see also Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995) argued that this effort to dehumanize those employed in large organizations was inappropriate. Indeed, as Ashforth and Humphrey argue, emotions can have many positive benefits for both employees and organizations – and that listening to and understanding our emotions can even lead to better decision-making, creativity, and innovation. Nevertheless, Ashforth and Humphrey also realized that unmanaged emotions can be a disruptive force in organizations and so describe four methods that organizations use to manage potentially disruptive emotions: (1) neutralizing emotion, (2) buffering emotion, (3) prescribing emotion, and (4) normalizing emotion.

Much of the literature on affect has simply regarded affect as comprising two categories: (1) positive affect and (2) negative effect. The literature on this has been voluminous; and great strides have been made in recent years in our understanding of how positive and negative affects influence a wide variety or organizational phenomena (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). For example, Miao et al. (2017) showed in a meta-analytic study that state positive and negative affects moderate the relationships between emotional intelligence and employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Building on this progress, researchers have also begun exploring specific emotions, including different types of negative emotions (cf. Gooty et al., 2009).

Thus, the chapters in this volume make their contribution through examination of negative emotions in organizational settings. Many of these chapters explore relatively underresearched topics, and thus the potential for their future impact is enormous. Many of these topics are underresearched despite the emotions they address having a major impact on people's lives. For example, while nearly everyone has experienced the emotions that come from failure, this is still a relatively unexplored topic in organizational behavior. Thus, in the first article, "The emotions of failure in organizational life" by Roy K. Smollan and Smita Singh, gives a thoughtful and innovative perspective on this pervasive emotion.[1]

Most of the chapters in this book were first presented as conference papers at the *Twelfth International Conference on Emotions and Worklife* ("Emonet XII").

This conference was originally scheduled as a face-to-face conference, to be held at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, the worldwide pandemic led to the canceling of the physical conference. In the spirit of "the show must go on," however, we did not cancel the conference, but instead held it virtually. The virtual conference was a great success, with a record number of people registering for the conference (179 registered attendees). In addition, the format fostered a high level of conversation and discussion, perhaps even more so than is typical at normal conferences. People interested in a session were encouraged to read the conference papers in advance. This let the synchronous sessions focus on discussion and interaction among the participants and the presenters.

The discussions were so lively and engaging that several sessions went over time. The networking aspect of the conference also worked well. Faculty members and postgraduate students who attended the conference made connections with each other, made plans to start new projects together, and received personal invitations to submit manuscripts to special issues of journals or books.

Perhaps most importantly, the conference resulted in a large number of high-quality, innovative, and thought-provoking papers, several of which we are fortunate enough to be able to include in this volume. In addition, we invited chapters from a mix of promising early career scholars and senior leaders in the field. These authors have contributed chapters on this volume's theme: emotions and negativity. Thus, these invited chapters have helped round out the volume.

We have organized the chapters under four section headings. Part I is entitled "Negative Emotions and Coping Strategies." Part II is "Emotional Regulation and Emotional Labor," and Part III is on "Managers and Leaders." Part IV is the Conclusions section, with a summary article called "Solutions to Negative Emotions." Below are our brief summaries of each of these chapters.

PART I: NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES

In the opening article of this section, authors Roy K. Smollan and Smita Singh review the literature on organizational failure and failing (De Keyser, Guiette, & Vandenbempt, 2019) across multiple domains of management research, including entrepreneurship, change management, and careers, which, as the authors note, has resonance in the era of COVID-19. Research has seldom investigated common and diverging themes in the personal experiences of failure across the many fields of management. It has also seldom distinguished between *failing*, a process that evolves over time, and *failure*, a (generally) final outcome (De Keyser et al., 2019). Smollan and Singh review this literature and present a 2×2 dynamic model of the positive and negative emotions associated with failure and failing for the individual actor, the factors that trigger these emotions and the potential positive and negative consequences. This model should provide a useful framework suitable for empirical examination as well as conceptual exploration and extension. Various organizational contexts are also considered.

In the next contribution, authors Sally V. Russell and Stephanie Victoria present a qualitative inductive study of how organizational change agents deal with the stress associated with their organizations' attempts to manage climate change. The authors argue that a change agent's job is inherently stressful and therefore requires a high level of emotional resilience to cope. Based on the emotional coping literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), they posit that change agents can adopt one (or more) of three competing strategies: (1) emotion-focused coping (EFC), which involves trying to erase emotional feelings altogether; (2) problem-focused coping (PFC), which entails dealing with the stressors seen to be causing emotions; or (3) meaning-focused coping (MFC), which involves alleviating stress by altering perceptions of the stress-inducing event. To investigate this notion, Russell and Victoria recruited 17 "green" change agents who agreed to sit for an in-depth interview and to be connected to a physiological data monitor, which measures heart rate, pulse, and galvanic skin conductivity (sweat response – a measure of stress, see Li et al., 2016). Results identified three categories of change agent responses: (1) "rational avoiders," who tended to employ EFC; (2) "committed go-getters," who inclined to use more PFC strategies; and (3) "green philosophers," who preferred MFC.

In the following article, Mahsa Amirzadeh, Neal M. Ashkanasy, Hamidreza Harati, Justin P. Brienza, and Roy F. Baumeister develop a model of the processes underlying the relationship between workplace social rejection and employee value change. The authors draw on evidence supporting the notion that external cues and life experiences (e.g., social rejection) can exert an influence on human values, previously thought to remain stable throughout life (Bardi et al., 2009). Three theoretical perspectives underline their model: (1) Schwartz's (1992) *human values theory*, (2) Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) *affective events theory*, and (3) Janoff-Bulman's (1992) *shattered assumptions theory*. Specifically, using affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the authors argue that social rejection is an affective event that results in either emotional distress or emotional numbness, and that both these states can lead socially rejected employees to changes in their values. Notably, in the model, emotional numbness plays a pivotal role in short-term value changes and emotional distress in long-term value changes.

The last article in this section of Part 1 is by Peter J. Jordan, Neal M. Ashkanasy, and Sandra A. Lawrence and it is particularly relevant at this time because of the worldwide job insecurity created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the authors cogently argue, organizations need to be concerned about their employees' feelings of job insecurity because these anxious feelings can lead to lower affective commitment, high work-related stress, and poor employee decision-making. Jordan and his colleagues theorize that employees who are high in emotional skills and in managing emotions are less prone to suffering the harmful negative effects of job insecurity. They tested their hypotheses using an online sample of 217 respondents and in a second study of 579 employees. Their results support their theories and highlight the important role that emotion management skills play in handling job insecurity and in maintaining effective decision-making capacity.

PART II: EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND EMOTIONAL LABOR

In the first article of this section, author Rebecca Dickason gives us a compelling analysis of the need for discretion and the use of emotional labor in hospital settings. Her qualitative analysis draws upon actual events in a hospital, such as a knife-wielding intruder demanding food, and a patient with Alzheimer's disease – that naturally elicit intense emotions across the range of human emotions, ranging from fear and aggression to sympathy and pity. She deftly shows how these situations call for judgment and discretion on the part of medical staff. Dickason also analyzes how hospitals develop emotional rules to handle these types of situations and to guide staff as to the appropriate emotional response in these demanding situations.

Next, two established stars in the field, Andrea Fischbach and Benjamin Schneider, develop an innovative model of emotional labor that highlights the importance of the work context. Fischbach and Schneider develop a table that categorizes the work context in terms of attributes of jobs, roles, professionalism, and emotional labor climate. As such, the article makes a useful and much needed expansion of emotional labor theory and practice. As the authors rightfully observe, few formal job descriptions include details of the emotional labor requirements in a job, yet emotional labor is a crucial component of many occupations. In a wide variety of jobs, the successful performance of emotional labor may be the difference between outstanding performance and failure. Fischbach and Schneider's essay thus can help working HR professionals understand the importance of recruiting for emotional labor competence and training people in the emotional labor requirements appropriate to their job, role, and organizational emotional labor requirements.

In the third article in this section, authors Dan H. Langerud, Peter J. Jordan, Matthew J. Xerri, and Amanda Biggs present a conceptual model proposing how employees' unmet entitlement beliefs affect their job satisfaction via their emotional regulation motives. Langerud and his co-authors contend that psychological entitlement, which they define as capturing "an inflated and pervasive sense of deservingness, self-importance, and exaggerated expectations to receive special goods and treatment without reciprocating (Lange et al., 2019, p. 1113)," appears to be on the rise in organizations with potential adverse consequences. The authors draw on equity theory (Leventhal, 1980) and the process model of emotional regulation (Gross, 1998) to theorize how the hedonic (seeks to maximize immediate pleasure and minimize pain) or instrumental (seeks to delay immediate gratification for specific outcomes) emotional regulation motives (Tamir, 2016) of an entitled employee elucidate the differential effects of unmet entitlement beliefs on work-related attitudes.

In the final contribution of this section, authors Kathryn E. Moura, Ashlea C. Troth, and Peter J. Jordan outline an empirical study where they test a new model of anger in the workplace, which they refer to as the relational anger model (RAM). In this model, which the authors derived from attribution theory (Heider, 1958) and emotional regulation theory (Gross, 1998), employees who are

targets of anger experience positive and negative health effects (such as self-esteem) in response to their perceptions of the anger via the targets' attributions of the appropriateness of the sender's anger. According to the RAM theory, the strength of this effect depends on which of three emotional regulation strategies the target adopts. Moura and her associates tested this theory in a sample of 122 employees, who completed two surveys, which they administered two weeks apart. Results generally supported the RAM hypotheses, although not always. Importantly, target perceptions of anger appropriateness came though as an important mediator of the perceived anger–health relationship. The authors also found support for their hypotheses relating to emotional regulation, especially that emotional suppression leads to increased negative outcomes (such as lowered self-esteem and decreased work functionality).

PART III: MANAGERS AND LEADERS

To open Part 3, author A K M Mominul Haque Talukder outlines how he developed and empirically tested a five-stage model linking supervisor family support (i.e., the extent to which employees see their supervisor as enabling them to meet their family demands) and employee job performance. Based on Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the model includes six intervening variables that contribute to this relationship: (1) perceived work demand, (2) perceived family demand, (3) work–family conflict, (4) family–work conflict, (5) work–life balance, (6) job satisfaction, (7) life satisfaction, and (8) organizational commitment. To test his model, the author conducted an online survey study involving 305 bank employees based in Sydney, Australia. Results supported most of the links in the hypothesized model, leading to a conclusion that emphasizes the imperative for organizational managers to consider work–life balance issues if they wish to maximize their employees' job performance and productivity.

In the following article, authors Hongguo Wei, Shaobing Li, and Yunxia Zhu outline development of a novel theoretical model of the paradoxical situation that ensues when a supervisor's compassionate behavior toward subordinates is unethical. For example, a supervisor may provide compassionate leave to a subordinate without first checking that co-workers are able to take up the slack. Based on Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking, Wei and her co-authors argue that both the supervisor's actions and the subordinate's interpretations of meaning determine their emotional responses to the situation, as well as helping to define their moral self. They next develop a 2×2 representation of subordinate sensemaking based on dimensions of the supervisor's compassionate but unethical behavior (private vs. public activity) and the subordinate's role in the compassion (bystander vs. sufferer). Based on this model, the authors develop four propositions relating to each of the quadrants defined by the 2×2 representation and defining a unique emotional response associated with each quadrant.

In the third and final contribution to Section 3, authors Elena Svetieva and Paulo Lopes consider the ostensibly universal advice that leaders should give positive feedback that is specific and mindful of nonverbal delivery (Ilies & Judge, 2005). The authors experimentally tested the hypothesis that positive feedback delivered with specificity would have a more positive impact on subordinate perceptions and motivation than vague positive feedback. They also predicted that this effect would be stronger if positive affective expressions by the leader accompanied feedback. In the study, 90 leaders received brief training in delivering positive feedback in one of four conditions. In terms of the affective component of the training, leaders were educated on the differences between a genuine (Duchenne) smile from the unfelt, non-Duchenne counterpart (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998). Assessing the impact of different types of leader feedback on their subordinates' positive affect, leader perceptions, and subsequent task effort, the authors found some mixed and intriguing findings that have implications for leader training regarding providing performance feedback.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

Our final article is a combination of solutions to negative emotions recommended by our contributors, plus some of our own insights. Thus, it offers a positive conclusion to the problems of negative emotions discussed in earlier articles. These solutions are arranged under the following headings:

(1) Failure and other negative experiences as learning opportunities: The positive side of negative emotions.
(2) The crucial role of attributions and cognitive reframing.
(3) The importance of emotional intelligence, emotional management, and psychological resilience.
(4) The role of leader empathy and organizational support in helping employees cope.
(5) The benefits to organizations of solving employee negative emotions: Better performance and organizational commitment.

Our concluding article ends the book on a positive note, as it offers a variety of practical solutions to negative emotions. Some of these solutions have been verified by decades of research, while for others the key evidence has only emerged in the last few years. For example, cognitive reappraisal has been a staple in therapists and counselors' toolboxes for decades, and considerable evidence has long backed its usefulness. However, meta-analyses that have documented the powerful effects of emotional intelligence on a wide variety of workplace outcomes have only been conducted in the last few years. Moreover, meta-analyses on the effectiveness of training in emotional intelligence skills and competencies have only recently been published. Likewise, although the popular press has been enamored with concepts like mindfulness and resiliency, solid evidence on these has only begun to accumulate. Thus, our final article covers the

latest state-of-the-art research on the most effective strategies for handling negative emotions in the workplace. Thus, both academicians and practitioners should find this article enlightening.

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NOTE

1. The conference version of this article deservedly won the Best Paper Award at the EMONET XII conference held in July 2020.

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