Research on Emotion in Organizations

VOLUME 18

Emotions During Times of Disruption

Ashlea C. Troth
Neal M. Ashkenasy
Ronald H. Humphrey

Editors

EMOTIONS DURING TIMES OF DISRUPTION

RESEARCH ON EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

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EMOTIONS DURING TIMES OF DISRUPTION

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EMOTIONS AND DISRUPTION

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

ABSTRACT

Purpose: *In this introductory chapter, we establish the basis for the theme of this volume, "Emotions and Disruption." We discuss how the initial idea for the theme arose during the height of COVID-19. At this time, and as widely reported in the press (e.g., see Grensing-Pophal, 2020), a myriad of workplace disruptions occurred impacting employees' moods and emotions and their subsequent well-being and performance. We open by discussing some key work on emotions research during change and disturbance, followed by a synopsis of each of the chapters in this volume, including discussion of their key contributions. This includes an overview of how some of these chapters were first presented as conference papers at the* Twelfth International Conference on Emotions and Worklife *(EMONET XII), an event that took place for the first time online in response to the turbulence and travel disruptions created by the pandemic.*

Approach: *In this chapter we give an outline of the organization of this book and discuss its four major parts. We then relate each chapter to the relevant part and consider its key contributions in terms of what we have learnt about emotions when applying the lens of disruption.*

Findings: *We conclude that the chapters provide a range of insights and practical solutions for dealing with emotions during different types of disruption that should be helpful to practitioners and academics.*

Value: *The chapters investigate underresearched topics and thus make new and important contributions. While many topics addressed in the chapters are still in their initial stages, they clearly have the potential to make a significant impact on people's work lives.*

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Keywords: Emotions; disruption; change; book overview; chapter summaries; solutions

It was relatively straightforward to decide on the theme "Emotions and Disruption" for Volume 18 of the series *Research on Emotion in Organizations*. Originating in Wuhan, China, toward the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has swept through the world with significant consequences for our work and family lives. We have seen a huge upsurge in remote working, collaborating and leading, and ways of working. As Chung (2022) notes, these changes have given rise to a myriad of challenges and concerns that include "Zoom fatigue," poor "digital demarcation," shifting power balances at work, and declining mental health and safety. Writers in the media (and especially the social media) have coined novel terms to capture new phenomena, like "the great resignation," the "great renegotiation," and "mini-commutes." These terms provide insights as to how individuals have reassessed and reimagined their work and nonwork lives during this difficult time. According to Pazzanese (2021, para. 12),

> The pandemic has jolted the foundation of a workplace model that had been relatively unchanged since the late 1920s: Employees traveling from home to a workplace five days a week, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., to complete their obligations.

COVID-19 and its impact have rightly increased scholarly and practitioner attention in the field of organizational behavior toward better ways to support and understand employees, leaders, and organizations; and to help them develop more effective responses to disruption of various forms. This is grounded in a larger body of existing work and viewpoints about what disruption entails (e.g., organizational change and institutional theory perspectives), and its consequences. For example, Barclay et al. (2021, p. 1) more broadly discuss how disruptions can be viewed as "disturbing the status quo" and create "the need for employees to navigate rapidly evolving demands in their work environment", often before formalized strategic plans can be developed and/or implemented. Barclay and her colleagues drew upon the seminal work of Meyer (1982) who viewed organizational adaptations to an "environmental jolt" (e.g., a doctors' strike) as a sudden and unprecedented event defined as "transient perturbations whose occurrences are difficult to for-see and whose impacts on organizations are disruptive and potentially inimical (p. 515)." Meyer reflected especially on how such disrupting events could be variously interpreted within organizations as either opportunities, threats, or crises (i.e., have both positive and negative outcomes). As such, understanding how individuals experience and respond to different types of organizational disruptions is critical for employees, leaders, and their organization.

In addressing these issues in this volume, we contend that emotions and other affect-related concepts (e.g., emotional display rules, emotional regulation strategies, emotional intelligence etc.) represent keys to understanding the phenomena of disruption in organizations more fully. Interestingly, literature to date addressing this issue is surprisingly scant. For instance, most of the research on

organizational change recipients and emotions tends to simply focus on positive or negative affect as outcomes (e.g., see Rafferty & Minbashian, 2019).

Another grouping of research on the topic is situated within institutional theory, where emotions are often seen as the precursor to disruption or "complicit with the work of maintaining, disrupting, or creating institutions" (Voronov & Vince, 2012, p. 61). More recently, drawing on appraisal theories of emotion, Barclay et al. (2021) argue that employees' appraisals of how the COVID-19 disruption has affected their work can elicit discrete emotions (e.g., frustration and pride) that in turn drives their job crafting behavior. Clearly, there still remains much scope for research on this topic.

Some of the chapters in this volume were presented as conference papers at the *Twelfth International Conference on Emotions and Worklife* ("Emonet XII") that was initially scheduled to be held in person at Lancaster University but proceeded online because of its scheduling at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unsurprisingly, several of the authors writing in this volume (e.g., see Chapter 3 by Linna Sei and Chapter 4 by Ann Parkinson) were concerned with aspects of disruption and thus, given the times, the idea for the theme for this book was generated. Following the Conference, we invited chapters from a mix of early career scholars and senior leaders in the field to help complete the volume.

When reading this volume, readers will see that the chapter authors have conceptualized "disruption" in many ways, at different levels (e.g., intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organization-wide), using a range of methodologies (experimental, diary, observational, survey, organization documents, computer apps) to show the varied and wide-ranging effects of emotional processes during disruption. Indeed, many of the chapter authors explore relatively under-researched topics (despite the topics they address having a major impact on people's lives). For example, while most people at work have experienced competing goals, this is still a fairly underinvestigated topic in organizational behavior, especially in connection to emotion. In Chapter 6, for example, Katrina Merlini and her collaborators describe how they employed a multiple goals framework (Unsworth et al., 2014) to test the novel idea that the activation (i.e., arousal) dimension of affect plays a critical role when employees need to allocate resources to meet multiple goals. Merlini and her team argue this sense of being pulled in two directions is an uncomfortably common occurrence that increases exponentially during crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). Thus, their chapter, titled "Pulled in two directions: How affect activation predicts resource allocation among multiple goals," provides a considered and innovative perspective on this phenomenon.

We have organized the chapters under four section headings. Part I is entitled "Emotions in disruptive contexts," Part II is "Emotions and performance-related outcomes during disruption," and Part III is on "The role of supervisors and leader emotions during disruption." Part IV is the conclusions section with a single chapter entitled "Conclusions: Learnings and solutions about emotions during disruption." We include reflections on the learnings from the chapters presented in Parts I to III and point the way forward with some further insights and recommendations. Following are brief summaries of each chapter.

PART I: EMOTIONS IN DISRUPTIVE CONTEXTS

The group of chapters in this part of the volume considers disruption as a powerful contextual influence on employees' emotions. Chapters in this section outline the disrupting effects of COVID-19, Brexit, and government policy changes. In the first chapter in this section (Chapter 2), authors Cynthia Barboza-Wilkes, Thai V. Le, and Marisa Turesky use an emotional labor framework (Grandey, 2000) to examine how 35 full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) female employees working in a Californian nonprofit organization emotionally adjusted to changes in their work environment during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of these employees was to give support to high-risk school students through their college careers. Barboza-Wilkes and her coauthors describe how their research focused on the adjustment (or re-adjustment) period that occurred within organizations at the onset of the pandemic. The authors argue that, during times of crises, organizations reengage in socialization processes to acclimate members to the changing circumstances at hand. They predicted in particular that FT employees would be more likely to engage in formal institutionalized socialization processes, while PT workers would experience more informal (and less formal) individualized socialization. They also hypothesized that this would lead to differences in workplace understandings about emotional expectations (i.e., norms) during the pandemic that would flow on to differences in emotional expression. Using a mixed-method study comprising surveys, daily diary entries, and semi-structured interviews, Barboza-Wilkes and her team found that PT workers reported the genuine expression of emotions more often than FT staff, and reported less suppression and in-authentic expression of emotions (i.e., surface acting) than their FT counterparts. They concluded that (in a sector that is heavily reliant on voluntary and part-time engagement) these differing rates of surface acting have meaningful implications for burnout and retention of employees.

In Chapter 3, author Linna Sai sets out a qualitative case study in which she relates how she interviews 37 employees working in two English housing associations undergoing organizational change. Sai focused on understanding how these employees managed in a situation where they experienced conflicting positive and negative (or "ambivalent") emotions about the change. Sai's research challenges prevailing ideas that dichotomous positive or negative emotions tend to predominate in organizational change scenarios. For example, while authors such as Harris and Gresch (2010) argue that employees' positive emotions are a critical factor in change success, others (such as Fineman, 2006) posit that negative emotions are also key determinants of the success or failure of change. In her studies, Sai found that, rather than experiencing positive or negative emotions, the employees she interviewed experienced a mixture of positive and negative emotions. She demonstrates further that, rather than just the (positive or negative) valence of experienced emotions, the key to change management success might lie in how the employees manage change.

In the next chapter (Chapter 4), author Ann Parkinson takes a "deep dive" into the nature and function of workplace relationships during a disruptive

pre-Brexit period that impacted three public service organizations in the United Kingdom. Parkinson conceptualizes workplace relationships on a continuum from co-workers formally exchanging information through to close colleagues (who are more intimate friends and share a deep level of trust), reflecting Kram and Isabella's (1985) information through to special peer relationships. Parkinson investigated how these different types of workplace relationships (i.e., co-workers, colleagues, close colleagues) support different employees' personal engagement (Kahn, 1990). She conducted her study in two stages. In Stage 1, she used a smartphone app to capture over 400 instances of transient emotions, reactions, and diary entries of employees interacting with their co-workers, colleagues, and close colleagues. In Stage 2, she conducted 25 follow-up interviews to gain participants' deeper reflections of the relationships (initially documented in the app). Parkinson provides rich quotes to illustrate how these different types of working relationships (varying on degree of emotional attachment and mutuality) operate in times of disruption; and reflect different levels and types of personal engagement (Kahn, 1990) at work (which are, in turn) underpinned by emotional elements. As the title suggests, she found that forming close colleague and friendships at work are conducive to supporting employees in times of disruption. In effect, these relationships enable employees to "release the pressure valve" to protect their mental health and well-being.

The following (Chapter 5) is authored by authors Ana Célia Araújo Simões, Sonia Maria Guedes Gondim, and Katia Elizabeth Puente-Palacios. In this chapter, the authors describe how they conducted a multisource and multilevel quantitative study of emotion work that occurs within the dynamic setting of a hospital. Based on emotional regulation and emotional labor theory (Grandey & Melloy, 2017), Simões and her colleagues hypothesize that the demands (i.e., display rules) on hospital workers to express compassion while at the same time hiding their feelings of anger or disapproval impact the ways they engage in deep and surface acting, ultimately affecting their emotional performance (i.e., their alignment with organizational and occupational display rules, cf. Diefendorff & Greguras, 2009). To test their predictions, Simões and her collaborators collected data regarding interactions with patients, companions, and co-workers from 306 workers and 30 work supervisors. Their results revealed that both deep and surface acting, as well as the need to hide feelings of anger or disappointment, can be factors in hospital work, but that the nature and intensity of these effects depend on the context of the emotional behavior.

PART II: EMOTIONS AND PERFORMANCE-RELATED OUTCOMES DURING DISRUPTION

There is now a well-established literature to show how the discrete emotion experienced by individuals (as well as their emotional competencies and responses within the workplace) can either facilitate or impede performance (cf. Jordan & Troth, 2004; Troth et al., 2012) and decision-making. In this section, chapter authors demonstrate these effects in the context of disruption at the intrapersonal

(Merlini et al.), individual (Choi et al.), group (Collins et al.), and organizational levels (Nanayakkara et al.) of analysis.

In the first chapter of this section (Chapter 6), authors Katrina Merlini, Patrick Converse, Erin Richard, and Anthony Belluccia employ a multiple goals framework (Unsworth et al., 2014) to test the novel idea that the activation (i.e., arousal) dimension of affect plays a critical role when employees need to allocate resources to meet multiple goals. Merlini and her co-authors argue that this sense of being pulled in two directions is an uncomfortably common phenomenon, and one that has increased exponentially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To test this idea, the authors conducted a 21-day daily diary study, where they asked two adult-participant groups (38 undergraduate students and 116 adults) to allocate resources across two competing goals. Each day, they recorded the affect valence and activation levels associated with the actions used to achieve each goal. They further assessed resource allocation in terms of three factors: (1) effort, (2) intended effort, and (3) intended time devoted to each goal. Merlini and her team found that the activation dimension of affect uniquely contributed to resource allocation decisions (beyond valence) suggesting that the activation of affect associated with a goal is an important attentional draw, signaling importance/urgency (Storebeck & Clore, 2008) and/or narrowing attentional focus (e.g., Easterbrook, 1959). Importantly, the authors concluded that these effects of affective activation go beyond the effects of valence. This result held irrespective of positive versus negative affect valence and suggests that past research focusing on affect valence (e.g., Beal et al., 2005) may not always tell the full story.

In the next chapter (Chapter 7), authors Min-Kyu Choi, Peter J. Jordan, and Ashlea C. Troth draw upon appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) and affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) to develop a theoretical framework to address the perennial problem of work interruptions. In their chapter, Choi and his colleagues argue that employees' responses to work interruptions are determined in large part by their emotional reactions to the interruption. In their theorizing, the authors distinguish between "work enhancing" interruptions (e.g., positive interventions such as co-workers sharing information, team-enhancing social interactions, or coffee breaks that aid recovery) and "work-hindering" interruptions (e.g., background disturbances such as noise; or external personal issues that result in "mind-wandering"). The authors argue further that emotional regulation (Gross & John, 2003) is a key process that mediates between the effects of interruptions and both work performance and employees' well-being outcomes.

In Chapter 8, Brian J. Collins, Tim P. Munyon, Neal M. Ashkanasy, Erin C. Gallagher, Sandra A. Lawrence, Jennifer O'Connor, and Stacey Kessler investigate whether the emotions elicited within teams under intense circumstances disrupt coordination and other team-related processes to impact decision-making. Basing their work in the affect infusion model (AIM: Forgas, 1995, 2002) and cognitive resource theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987; Fielder, 1986), the authors identify the conditions under which team affect asymmetry or dispersion (i.e., the within-team variance of group member negative and positive affect)

infuses and disrupts team cognitive processing and subsequent decision outcomes. Collins and his co-authors describe how, by using a simulated survival-based team decision-making task, they were able to study the interactive relationship between team affect asymmetry and the moderating effect of team process norms (i.e., high vs. low coordination) on decision-making performance. The research team found that the best team decision performance occurred when team members shared similar levels of PA (irrespective of the level of PA) and interacted without regard to strict protocols (low process norms). Conversely, teams operating under low-process norms in the presence of high positive affect asymmetry made the worst decisions. There was no effect for positive affect asymmetry in teams characterized by high-process norms, and nor were any effects found for NA asymmetry. Based on these findings, Collins et al. argue that, rather than encouraging universally high levels of positive affect, organizational managers and team leaders should pay more attention to the *distribution* of positive affect.

Finally in this section, Samangi Nanayakkara, Vathsala Wickramasinghe, and Dinesh Samarasinghe present in Chapter 9 the results of a study where they investigated the extent to which the emotional intelligence (EI) of managerial employees in the Sri Lankan banking sector impacts the effects of technological strategic management on organizational performance. Nanayakkara et at al. argue that an emotionally intelligent individual working in a dynamic industry (such as the banking sector) can handle threat signals and challenges more effectively and are more likely to be more successful at adapting to new challenges. To test their ideas, the authors surveyed over 1000 managerial level employees. They found that those with higher EI were more able to translate technological strategy (i.e., technology strategy, knowledge management, and technological capability) into organizational performance (i.e., learning and growth, internal business processes, financial performance, and stakeholder satisfaction). The authors conclude that this demonstrates the importance of managerial EI training and development in dynamic and constantly changing workplaces.

PART III: THE ROLE OF SUPERVISORS AND LEADERS IN DISRUPTION

We know emotions play a central role in organizational leadership (e.g., see Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000) and it is now well accepted that emotions are inherent in the daily interactions between leaders and their subordinate (Tse et al., 2018). Less is known about how this occurs in the context of disruption, however. This is the basis of the three chapters presented in this section.

The authors of Chapter 10, Caitlin Fulcher and Neal M. Ashkanasy, investigate an understudied form of implicit abusive supervision: gaslighting. Gaslighting is referred to as a form of psychological manipulation whereby a "gaslighter" seeks to confuse, to disorientate, and to cast doubt in the mind of the victim (Sweet, 2019). Specifically, Fulcher and Ashkanasy investigated if

supervisory gaslighting, a destructive form of psychological disruption, affects employees' affective organizational commitment (AOC) by lowering the quality of the leader-member exchange relationship (LMX). They also looked at the potential buffering effect of an employee's EI on the impact of supervisory gaslighting. In their study, 266 employees read three scenarios depicting different levels of workplace gaslighting. Intriguingly, while they found, in line with expectations, that gaslighting decreases LMX and subsequent AOC, they found, contrary to expectations, that EI *exacerbated* the negative effects of gaslighting. This result is inconsistent with past research that shows EI tends to buffer the effect of abusive supervision on employees' behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Hu, 2012). Fulcher and Ashkanasy speculate that this may be an effect of the "curse of emotions," where high EI individuals (Antonakis et al., 2009; Pekaar et al., 2017) are sensitized to emotional cues such as gaslighting, at least in the context of implicit abusive behavior. They argue that this intriguing notion holds potential to open up some interesting new avenues for future research.

In Chapter 11, Al J. Hudson, Peter J. Jordan, and Ashlea C. Troth demonstrate how organizational change is disruptive for leaders' emotions and subsequent behaviors. In their research, they aimed to understand the emotions leaders experience during organizational change and what emotion regulation strategies they enact to support positive outcomes. To study this, they interviewed 25 middle and senior Australian managers (who were involved in organizational change) using the Kahneman et al. (2004) "day reconstruction" protocol. Drawing on affective events theory (AET: Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and the process model of emotion regulation (Gross & John, 1998), they conceptualized change as an affective event that triggers emotional responses by leaders. The authors found leaders managing organizational change processes described the experience as a series of disruptive affective events that were more often associated with experiences of negatively valenced emotions. They also reported being more likely to respond with the emotion regulation strategy of suppression (i.e., masking negative feelings with neutral or positive affective displays). Importantly, they reported finding that a major reason leaders reported responding with suppression was to maintain their professionalism, even if this undermined their health and well-being. This chapter points to importance of leader EI and emotional regulation training in turbulent times.

In Chapter 12, Audrey Teh considers the underexplored use of the "dreaded" emotions of leaders' anger, fear, and sadness. While Teh discusses how these three negatively valenced emotions are commonly dreaded or perceived poorly or with trepidation by leaders and their followers, she also highlights literature demonstrating the potential bright side of these affective states. Using a social functional approach (e.g., Keltner & Haidt, 1999) to examine these emotions, and drawing on work by Lindebaum and Jordan (2014) that considers the symmetrical and asymmetrical effects of affect, Teh points to the rich opportunities for research on this topic, especially the understudied emotion of sadness in regards to leadership.