Presenting a model of negative and positive emotions within individuals at work

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ABSTRACT: *The impact of emotions has become an important focus for research within organisations. Existing studies that examine emotions in organizations generally have only addressed discrete positive or negative emotions. In this paper, we present a new model for considering the simultaneous impact of positive and negative emotion on the behaviour of individuals at work. Our model fills a gap in the literature and we suggest that this model may encourage a new stream of research that considers the simultaneous impact of positive and negative emotion in the workplace. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.*

Keywords: emotions, emotional labour, emotional intelligence, complexity, organisational behaviour

Emotions are ubiquitous in organisations and calls for research on emotions in organisations has been around for some time (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). There have been numerous studies on negative emotion in organisations linking negative emotion to organisational change (Bartunek, 1984; Brockner et al., 1986; Brockner, 1988; Kiefer, 2005; Huy, 2002; Mossholder et al., 2000; Piderit, 2000), work stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Fineman, 1996), and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Other studies have focused on positive emotions in organisations, examining compassion (Frost et al., 2000; Kahn, 1993; Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius & Kanov, 2002), the positive influence on the neurobiological system of organisations (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008), the impact of positive emotion management (Koskina & Keithley, 2010), creativity (Isen, 1987), positive climates (Denison, 1996; Smidts, Pruyin & Van Riel, 2001), positive deviance (Fredrickson, 1998; 2003; Bagozzi, 2003), gratitude (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and forgiveness (Bright, 2006; Cameron & Caza, 2002). With such a diverse foundation in multiple fields we ask "why are emotions in organisational research only conceptualised as discrete or unidirectional?" While there is clear research evidence that individuals can experience both positive and negative emotion simultaneously (Taylor, 1991), within the research literature it is almost as if this is forgotten and there is an assumption that negative and positive emotions are actually discrete. We contend that this oversight may be due to the difficulty of simultaneously capturing the experience of both positive and negative emotions at work. Whatever the reason, our aim in this paper is to close this gap in the

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literature by presenting a model of simultaneous positive and negative emotions in individuals at work, an essential first step to exploring this phenomenon.

Emotions in Organisations

Research on emotions in organisations really came to the fore with the publication of Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labour. Other work by Mumby and Putnam (1992) on Bounded Emotionality within organisations continued this trend. Bounded Emotionality proposed a duality of emotions and rationality at work and argued against the dominant paradigm of the time: that emotions were the opposite of cognition. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) everyday emotions were neglected in organisational research. At that time they argued that a focus on emotions in the workplace was essential. Since that time research on emotion in organisations has flourished as evidenced by the research cited in our introduction. Indeed, now even entire series of books dealing with the topic with updated editions are being published (e.g., Ashkanasy, Zerbe & Hartel, 2002; Fineman, 2000).

Emotions within organisations have also been studied on multiple levels. For instance, Ashkanasy and Jordan (2008) introduce a Multilevel Model of Emotions in Organisations (MMEO) that is based on the idea that emotions can be studied on five levels of organisational analysis: within-person (e.g. affective events, emotional reactions, impulsive behaviours), between-persons (e.g. individual differences like EI, attitudes, decision-making), interpersonal interactions (e.g. emotional labour, trust), groups and teams (e.g. direct influence, emotional contagion, LMX, affective tone) and organisation-wide (e.g. emotional climate, bounded emotionality, organisational performance) (Ashkanasy & Jordan, 2008). Interpersonal interactions, or shared emotions, are those that are externally visible. Emotional labour found in the studies of Rafaeli & Sutton (1989; 1991) clearly follow this stream of emotion research while Isen and Baron (1991) look more on intrapersonal emotions. However, calls have been made for more empirical work of emotions on a "within-person" level (Ashkanasy & Jordan, 2008), which is the level our model will address.

There is far less research at the within-person level (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2002).   While

both positive and negative emotions have been studied at the within-persons level (e.g.

Fischer & Noble, 2004), this has not been simultaneous. Indeed, the new field of positive

psychology examines how to change negative emotions into positive emotions (Fredrickson,

2001). This bifurcation leads to a mindset where negative emotions are bad and positive

emotions are good (see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Fickenauer, & Vohs, 2001 for an

explanation of why this happens). On the other hand, we argue that emotions are useful for

the utility they provide in making sense of situations and that simultaneous experience of

positive and negative emotions are the essence of the sense making process.

What are emotions?

The cross-disciplinary field of emotions is complex. Elfenbein (2007) defines emotions as the

adaptive responses to the demands of the environment. Emotions have been described as

higher intensity short-term reactions to stimuli, while moods are lower intensity, longer

experiences that can often lack stimuli. Emotions have been described as discrete experiences

such as hate, love, anger, grief and joy (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987).

Furthermore, emotions can be divided into subjective feelings (these are internal), expressive

behaviour (emotions that can be seen externally) and physiological/body responses (such as

sweating, blood rushing to the face, the release of adrenaline and the increase in heart rate). A

range of theoretical work has been done on emotions in organisations including Elfenbein's

emotional process (Elfenbein, 2007), affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996),

emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979; and Bounded Emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992).

In the following section we briefly summarise these theories as they inform our model.

The process of emotions

Elfenbein (2007) developed a five-step model that explains the process of emotion in

individuals. First, a stimulus occurs according to the environmental situation. Secondly, the

stimulus triggers an emotional registration, which is regulated by individual schemata and "feeling-rules" and accounts for the emotional experience of the situation. This third component of the automatic components in the intrapersonal emotion process responds according to individual differences of tendencies to experience positive and negative affect. Studies show that positive affect can have a beneficial influence on the cardiovascular, immune and neuroendocrine systems (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008) while negative affect can lead to job strain and stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Fourthly, there is an emotional expression that often includes display regulations. This regulation can be based on norms masking the underlying feeling with more "appropriate" expression. These norms are even explicitly outlined in some organisations in their corporate manuals (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). This regulation can in the long-term lead to emotional labour (EL), a common commodity within today's service industry (Hochschild, 1983). Finally, the expressive cues such as smiles (whether authentic or regulated) are expressed. This process provides a foundation for the model in this paper.

Affective Events Theory

Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) affective events theory (AET) centres on work events as a cause of affective reactions (stimuli) in individuals. In this model, the work environment produces events (situations), which cause affective reactions in individuals. These reactions are dependent on dispositions (such as genetically regulated intensity of moods), environmental causes (weather, noise and pollution), affect driven behaviours (coping and mood management processes) and judgment driven behaviours (e.g. mediated by job satisfaction). All of these factors together influence work attitude, which fluctuates over time. Also, in a study by Watson et al., (1999) positive and negative emotions fluctuated according to circadian rhythms. Hence, when looking at emotion in individuals as well as in organizations, circadian rhythms should be taken into account as they may also influence work attitudes.

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The basic premise of AET is that affective experiences at work influence overall judgments about job satisfaction. There is a "psychic cost" of an event on the subjective well being of individuals. This "cost" is higher depending on the frequency of events, not necessarily on the intensity. This means that a long-term exposure to traumatic events is more damaging to the individual than episodes that allow for recuperation-time. AET provides a justification for the fact that events in organisations generate emotional reactions and this is a core assumption in our model.

Emotional Labour

Hochschild (1983; 90) defined emotional labour as the "…management of feeling to create a publicly facial and bodily display." The disassociation between internal feelings and outward behaviour is what wears away and can cause stress and disillusions about personal authenticity. Emotional labour infers that simultaneous feelings of positive and negative emotion do occur. Indeed, warnings about emotional and cognitive dissonance that can be precipitated by emotional labour set up these dual feelings. Researchers have referred to deep acting (attempting to feel the emotions that are required for display) and surface acting (displaying emotions that are not actually felt through verbal and nonverbal cues) (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). The issue here is that individuals can display one emotion while feeling another emotion. While we acknowledge that there is a difference between felt and displayed emotion, research has shown that purely expressing positive emotions can results in changes in brain chemistry as if one were actually feeling that emotion (Burgdorff & Panksepp, 2006). Emotional labour therefore contributes to our overall model by supporting our assertion that workers can feel simultaneous feelings of positive and negative emotion

Bounded Emotionality

Mumby and Putnam (1992) define bounded emotionality as the controlled expression of emotion to enhance relationships. From a bounded emotionality perspective, the ability to

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regulate one's own emotions is an essential skill. Therefore, the ability to regulate and control one's own emotions is essential for the implementation of bounded emotionality in organizations. Martin et al. (1998) agree, stating that the ability to express emotions, combined with the ability to control emotions, contributes to relationship building in organisations. Bounded emotionality contributes the focus on emotional regulation to our model.

THE MODEL

The literature on emotions in the workplace acknowledges that there are positive and negative emotions. The gap in the literature seems to be that there is little research on the simultaneous experience of negative and positive emotions. In this paper we suggest a model to address this gap. Our model (Figure 1) builds on Elfenbein's emotional process (Elfenbein, 2007), affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and Bounded Emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). In the following section we go through the model and explain its theoretical implications.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Trigger event / Critical Event

Our model (Figure 1) starts with a trigger event or a critical event. Weiss and Cropanzano have illustrated through their Affective Events Theory (AET) that it is the "discrete reactions precipitated by specific events" that lead to emotional states in the workplace (1996; 41). The event "triggers" an automatic stimulus in the individual. Elfenbein (2007) lists events that create an emotional stimulus at work as social interactions with other people; economic conditions and events (Brief & Weiss, 2002); environmental factors e.g. noise, temperature (Isen & Baron, 1991); physical artefacts e.g. symbols, colours (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004); external factors e.g. family problems (Brief & Weiss, 2002); as well as engaging in the

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work itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Sandelands, 1988). For our purpose, it is not essential to know the specifics of the event – just that it creates a reaction in individuals. This reaction is both automated as well as managed consciously. For example, a project manager finds that his/her leader has agreed to a particularly tight deadline for a new project. This tight deadline will have implications for completing ongoing projects on time. On this basis the event could be construed as a trigger event / critical event for that individual.

> *Proposition 1 Work events will result in individuals embarking on a process of primary and secondary appraisal.*

Primary/secondary appraisal

The primary appraisal of an event or crisis is a result of the registered emotion that is a result of a stimulus. For example the project manager in our example who has been given more work with tight deadlines might have an initial emotional reaction of fear "How will I get this finished in time?" and "How will this impact on my other work commitments?" This primary emotion is automatic and unconscious, and is often related to our survival instincts of fight or flight (Gray, 1987).

The secondary appraisal is consciously formed through evaluating previous experiences. Depending on experiences in similar situations a new emotion is formed. If the project manager has succeeded in meeting all deadlines in the past and is a creative problem-solver the secondary appraisal of the event might be calmer, "I've been in this situation before and managed the tasks, so no doubt I'll be able to do that this time too". This positive reappraisal can be essential for the individual not to feel overwhelmed by the tasks (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

The appraisal process is based on the stress literature and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping is defined as the "process of managing external and/ or internal demands that tax or exceed the resources of the person"(Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; 745). Coping strategies

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such as stress management developed in response to the increased attention to stress by research in the 1980s. Also, Lazarus and Folkman developed in 1984 the transactional model that deals with how stress is perceived and how the individuals coping abilities are appraised.

Individual differences

Individual differences will impact on our primary and secondary appraisal of events. Specifically we argue that there are three broad factors that impact on the appraisal process, specific aspects of personality, emotional intelligence and work experience. We argue that specific personality variables such as Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966) have a direct influence on our appraisal processes (Parkes, 1984). We also contend that emotional intelligence; an ability to be aware of and manage emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) will have an impact on this process. Individuals with high emotional intelligence will be aware of potential emotional triggers and manage this process during the appraisal process (Jordan, Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2002). Finally we argue that the amount of experience an individual has will affect this appraisal process (Arnold, 1960). Clearly experience and personality provides us with access to heuristics that will affect our appraisal of events (Arnold, 1960).

Proposition 2a Aspects of personality will directly influence the appraisal of events as positive or negative.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in self and others" (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000; 396). The concept has gained popular interest through management consultancy and has developed different models as a result. There are basically two distinctions of EI models. Firstly, the ability model of EI looks at the emotions themselves and their cognitive connections (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 1997). Secondly, the mixed models of Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) see all mental abilities and other characteristics such as motivation, states of consciousness and social activity, all as part of EI.

EI has been criticized as lacking empirical support and predictive ability (Antonakis et al.,

2009). We acknowledge this interesting debate but maintain EI to have important value

especially for emotions within individuals. In our example the project manager might have a

high level of EI because s/he reasons with the fear of failure by providing reassurance from

previous successes. Research shows that individuals with high EI are generally more positive

than those with low EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1995). Furthermore, those with higher EI levels

may be more realistic as they can understand and manage emotions to a higher degree than

persons with lower EI.

> *Proposition 2b The level of emotional intelligence an individual has will directly*
>
> *impact on their appraisal of events such that those with high emotional intelligence will*
>
> *be more likely to appraise events positively.*

> *Experience*

Having been confronted with a similar situation or felt similar emotions before can create

coping skills that are unique to that person. Overcoming adversity in a positive way can create

resilience that may serve the individual during future obstacles. Resilience is a focal concept

involved in studies on trauma or crisis that look at why some individuals overcome problems

while others do not. For example, in a study on 9/11 Fredrickson et al (2003) suggest that

positive emotions buffer individuals from trauma and prevent disease such as depression from

forming after a strong emotional event. Her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions

describes how these events broaden individuals' thought-action repertoire and builds their

long-term personal resiliency (Fredrickson, 1998). According to Isen (1987; 2002) positive

emotions "enlarge" cognitive contexts that affect the dopamine levels in the brain. Hence,

experiences that have had a positive result affect resilience in a positive way.

> *Proposition 2c The amount of relevant work experience an individual has will directly*
>
> *influence the appraisal of events as positive or negative.*

Negative and positive emotion

Once the secondary emotional appraisal of the negative event is formed, this will elicit felt emotions. For example the project manager may feel a combination of anger or fear or anxiety. We suggest that such emotion is rarely discrete and that positive emotions are intertwined with the negative emotions. It is this crucial differentiation that separates our model from previous ones. In our example, the project manager may feel angry regarding the introduction of a new deadline but at the same time having reappraised his/her ability to meet the deadline they may view this as a challenge, which they can rise to. In this way there is a duality of positive and negative emotions that influence how s/he expresses, regulates and manages emotions and ultimately behaviour.

> *Proposition 3 Individuals will simultaneously experience both positive and negative emotion with negative emotions predominating for some people and positive emotions predominating for others.*
>
> *Proposition 4 The experience of positive emotions will moderate the experience of negative emotions and inform their emotional regulation decisions.*

Emotion expression, regulation & management

Emotional expression deals with emotive cues that can be externally observed (e.g. smiles, tears) and has had a strong impact within the field of communication (Morris & Keltner, 2000). These expressions can be voluntarily regulated as emotional labour. In a case study by Martin et al. (1998) on The Body Shop, emotional cues such as crying were used to create passion for their campaigns. Using emotions in this way as part of the organisational strategy to reach their goals has been criticized as personally invasive (Martin et al. 1998) but could be used as a tool for organisational alignment.

In the interesting studies of Rafaeli and Sutton, they looked at store clerks and bill collectors and how these people use emotional displays as emotional controls to manage situations

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(Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; 1991). This emotional management technique is part of emotional labour, when internal emotions conflict with external displays.

Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as "the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions…(they) may be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious…" (p.275). Regulation is part of managing emotions. In our example of a tight deadline, taking control of swells of panic that automatically come into the project manager's mind, defuses the situation from escalating and focuses the him/her on the task. Therefore the positive emotion management technique of calming oneself down through reasoned thinking influences the behaviour of a calmer, more focused individual getting on with the work task. Negative emotional management includes avoidance or withdrawal (in our example, the project manager might choose to ignore the tight schedule by watching TV instead of getting to work).

> *Proposition 5 Individuals who apply positive emotional management and emotional regulation techniques will move towards positive action.*
>
> *Proposition 6 Individuals who apply negative emotional management and emotional regulation techniques will move towards negative action.*

The model should be tested to assess its validity in an organizational setting. Using a variety of methods could corroborate its validity through triangulation therefore suggesting that mixed methods of qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods are appropriate to test the model. Quantitative methods are most appropriate for propositions 2a, 2b and 2c. A survey on personality, EI, and work experience could reveal important individual differences. As there are already a variety of measures on these concepts, these could be used (for example: PANAS, WEIP and Big 5). All other propositions are most effectively researched through qualitative methods (for example participatory-observation and interviews). Participatory-observation would allow the researcher access to information on an intra-subjective level. When it comes to

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researching emotions, especially those on a within person level, creative, and unorthodox methods may be required. According to Fineman (1993; 222) "capturing emotion in process requires some methodological ingenuity". Stories and diaries have previously been suggested as ways to do this as well as using yourself as the subject (Fineman, 1993; Domagalski, 1999). In this way, diary entries would allow for appraisal analysis as well as information on the regulation of emotion. In an interview setting, critical incident technique (CIT) could be used to unpack data. The benefit of using CIT is that it is flexible and allows for reviewing the issues of a specific incident (or trigger event) through asking the interviewee a range of questions to determine details of the incident. By having the interviewees supply data by answering the standardized questions a more realistic account of how an event influenced emotion and behaviour is assured.

Limitations

Limitations of the model include the subjective nature of studying emotions and how the model relies on subjective accounts of data. In this way, generalisation is restricted but on the other hand knowledge and understanding of behaviour is expanded.

Implications for theory & practice

Theory would benefit from the proposed model by closing the gap in literature on simultaneous negative and positive emotions within persons. Organizations as well as individuals would gain insight on internal processes and how these are linked to outward behaviour. In this way, more support during challenging events could affect appraisals and how emotions are regulated in organizations. This could result in healthier and happier individuals as well as more effective organizations.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we propose a new model that explains the experience of simultaneous positive and negative emotions in individuals at work. Previous research on emotions has ignored the

possibility that positive and negative emotions happen simultaneously within individuals. Future research will have to test this model and supply empirical evidence for its feasibility along with testing different practical research methods. Also, the impact of external influences such as emotional climates and contagion, trust and leadership on the simultaneity of positive and negative emotions should be considered in more detail in future research. We acknowledge that there are limitations to our model. As our model only addresses the within-person process, we do recognize the organizational context and leadership factors that may influence our model on a larger scale.

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Figure 1: Negative and positive emotions within individuals