OVERVIEW: The Effect of Affect in Organizational Settings

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Welcome to the first volume in the series, Research on Emotion in Organizations. We are hopeful that serous scholars of emotion in organizational settings will come to view the volumes in this series as a principal source of reference for the latest ideas in this field. In fact, this volume is the fourth of the ‘Emonet’ books, edited by this team. The three earlier books were Emotions in the Work Place: Theory, Research, and Practice (Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Zerbe, 2000), Managing Emotions in the Work Place, (Ashkanasy, Zerbe, & Härtel, 2002), and Emotions in Organizational Behavior, (Härtel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasy, 2004). Like the earlier books, the present volume is an initiative of the ‘Emonet’ e-mail discussion group, and comprises several invited chapters together with a selection of the outstanding papers presented at the biannual International Conferences on Emotion and Organizational Life, which is also an initiative of the Emonet group. Before introducing the present volume in detail, therefore, it is appropriate to say a little more about Emonet and the conferences.

The Emonet e-mail discussion group, which now has over 500 subscribers, and resides on the Academy of Management Listserv, was initiated following a symposium, titled “Emotion in the workplace: Not just skin deep,” chaired by Neal Ashkanasy and presented at the 1996 meetings of the Academy of Management in Cincinnati. The following year, at the Academy’s meetings in Boston, Ashkanasy and Härtel organized a “Caucus” round-table discussion, out of which grew the First International Conference on Emotion and Organizational Life, which was held prior to the Academy’s meetings in San Diego, in August, 1998. The first conference attracted 40 submissions (of which 26 were accepted and presented) and attracted 70 delegates.
Since then, the “Emonet conferences” as they have come to be known, have been held in Toronto, Ontario (August, 2000), The Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia (July, 2002), and London, England (June, 2004). The fifth conference in the series is scheduled to be held in Atlanta, Georgia in conjunction with the 2006 Academy of Management meetings. The Emonet group has also continued to hold Caucus discussions at the Academy’s meetings in odd-numbered years, including the 2005 meetings in Honolulu, Hawaii. Readers interested in learning more about the conferences or the Emonet list should check the Emonet website http://www.uq.edu.au/emonet/.

**The 2004 Emonet conference**

Nine of the chapters in this volume were sourced from the *Fifth International Conference on Emotions and Organizational Life*, held at Birkbeck College, London, in June, 2004, and attended by 77 delegates. A record 46 papers were submitted to the conference, of which 27 were selected for presentation, in addition to one symposium. The nine papers chosen for this book were selected on the basis of their quality, interest, and appropriateness for the theme of this volume, “The effect of affect in organizational settings.” (A further set of papers has been selected to appear in Volume 2 of this book series.) We acknowledge in particular the assistance of the conference paper reviewers (see Appendix), who returned high quality reviews in a very short time.

**The theme of this volume**

As the first volume in the series, we wanted the theme to reflect core issues in emotions research. Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) has been one of the most influential articles in the field, and places affect and emotion squarely within the nexus of
organizational environment and behavioral/attitudinal consequences for organizational members. Thus, in selecting papers to match the theme we chose, “the effect of affect in organizational settings”, it is no surprise that many of them are based in AET. This was our motivation for asking Howard Weiss, one of the co-inventors of AET, to contribute the key scene-setting chapter to the book. We also wanted the chapters to span a spectrum of approaches to studying emotions in organizational settings, including the more critical approached represented, for example, in Fineman’s two (1993, 2000) collections of essays. Thus, the volume includes a selection of thought-provoking critical pieces, concluding with an invited critical summary authored by Rob Briner and Tina Kiefer, who organized a symposium on this topic at the 2004 Emonet conference. In the following, we provide an introductory summary of the chapters in this volume.

**The Chapters**

As we noted above, the opening chapter is an invited contribution. Authored by Howard Weiss and Daniel Beal, this chapter presents an important overview of research based on AET, including insights into the basic philosophy of the model. The authors note that AET is “not a testable model, but rather a different paradigm for studying affect at work” (p. ??). Also, the authors go to some lengths to clarify the assumptions underlying AET, including some of the misconceptions that have appeared in the literature; and they dispute the view taken by Ashkanasy and Ashton-James in Chapter 2 that AET represents a “seminal” contribution to the literature. Weiss and Beal conclude, however, that AET has nonetheless been influential, although they note that there remain many unanswered questions.

Chapter 2, by Claire Ashton-James and Neal Ashkanasy, represents an attempt to answer some of the questions posed by Weiss and Beal in Chapter 1, in an analysis of the basic
psychological processes that underlie AET. Their analysis is based in a process model of affect and cognition developed by Ashkanasy, Ashton-James, and Jordan (2004), which is in turn based on the ‘four branches’ of emotional intelligence defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997). The authors express the hope that their analysis will provide direction for scholars to pursue a deeper understanding of AET.

Chapter 3, by Michael Stratton, is also based in AET, but this time the spotlight is turned to applications of AET in practice. Stratton examines the role of emotions that arise when organizations monitor employee personal use of the internet in the particular context of personal web usage (PWU). Such monitoring leads to conflicting emotions that Stratton characterizes as “emotional ambivalence”, or the simultaneous association of both negative and positive emotions with an event. Stratton concludes with discussion of several intriguing avenues for future research based on this idea.

In the following chapter, Abraham Cameli and Sidika Nihal Colakoglu, focuses on one of the specific relationships identified in AET, between affective commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The authors argue that research has yet to demonstrate this relationship definitively, and suggest that emotional intelligence may moderate the effect. Using data from an Israeli health care agency, they found that the positive relationship between affective commitment and OCB (altruism) was stronger for high-emotional intelligence individuals.

David Holman, Peter Totterdell, and Steven Rogelberg focus in Chapter 5 specifically on motivation and its effect on employees’ affective experiences in the workplace. For example, why is it that some employees feel anxious in the morning and become calmer in the afternoon? In an innovative test of Carver and Scheier’s (1998) theory of self-regulation – the first time this
theory has been tested in an applied setting – the authors report results that yield intriguing theoretical and practical implications for management and practitioners alike.

Chapter 6, by Sarah Wright is based on the author’s award-winning paper presented at the 2004 Emonet conference. Wright argues that the traditional rational/instrumental models of organizational control may result in negative emotional responses such as loneliness. In a study involving 362 participants, Wright confirmed that employees in a supportive and fear-free organizational environment are less likely to experience loneliness.

The following chapter, by Herman Tse, Marie Dasborough, and Neal Ashkanasy, shifts the focus of attention from the individual to the team level of analysis. These authors argue from a theoretical perspective that emotion plays a key role as a predictor of team-member exchange (TMX) – the quality of social exchange between team members. In addition, group-level variables such as affective climate within the group, and the group leader’s leader-member exchange (LMX) differentiation, play a moderating role.

In Chapter 8, Jonathan Matheny and Roy Smollan investigate the relationship between experienced emotions, perceptions of justice, and types of organizational change. In an exploratory study, they asked respondents to describe the nature of organizational changes that they had experienced, their perception of the degree of organizational justice associated with those changes and valence of the outcome, and the type and intensity of the emotions that they may have experienced as a consequence. Consistent with previous studies, the authors found that positive emotions were more often associated with perceptions of justice and favorable outcomes and negative emotions with perceptions of injustice and unfavorable outcomes.

Chapter 9 is arguably the most unique chapter in this volume. Chris Poulson, Joseph Duncan, and Michelle Massie use Shakespeare’s plays, in particular Othello, to understand management concepts and theories. The authors focus on negative emotions such as shame,
jealousy, envy, revenge and *schadenfreude* (pleasure in others’ misfortune) and how these are depicted in *Othello*. They then link these ideas to the traditional management literature to determine how and why employees exert negative behaviour; how managers can understand their motives and; consequently, how managers can manage this behaviour.

In Chapter 10, Jacob Eisenberg and Keith James attempt to bring clarity to the inconsistencies among studies of the relationship between affect and creativity. Focusing on the role of affect characteristics, neuro-cognitive mechanisms, and the type of creative task being performed, the authors explain discrepant findings and posit testable propositions for future research.

Working at the organizational level of analysis, Timothy Coombs and Sherry Holladay explore in Chapter 11 how organizations should react to crises and, in particular, how an understanding of the emotions experienced by customers and clients sheds light on the utility of different communication response strategies. In an exploratory study, the authors found that the emotions experienced by stakeholders relate to the effectiveness of alternative organizational communication strategies.

The final chapter in this volume constitutes a timely and critical overview of research on emotion and affect in organizations. In the chapter, authors Rob Briner and Tina Kiefer review the current state of research into the experience of emotion at work, and conclude that much of the research to date has been inconclusive.

**Conclusions**

As we promised, the chapters in this volume extend across a variety of perspectives and research designs to study emotional phenomena at all levels of organizational analysis. As such, they reflect the multi-level approach to studying emotion in organizations that Ashkanasy (2003)
addressed. The studies also reinforce the point, made by Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) a decade ago, that organizations are literally saturated with emotion. Also clear in this volume is that there are still many unanswered questions left for researchers of emotion in organizations to tackle. This is especially evident in the opening and closing chapters. Clearly, there remains enormous scope for scholars to continue their efforts to understand emotion in organizations. Our hope is that the chapters in this new series will act as an important catalyst in this respect.

**References**


Appendix: Conference Reviewers

Alia Al-Serkal
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