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Emotion and Performance

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Abstract

The study of emotions in organizational settings has attained considerable prominence in recent years, but one critical issue remains unresolved. This is the relationship between emotion and performance. In this Special Issue, five papers address this topic from a variety of viewpoints. Two are theoretical essays that deal respectively with emotion and creativity and the relationships between individual and team performance. Three are empirical studies that canvass the emotion-performance nexus across levels of analysis: within-person, between-person and in groups. Between them, the five papers present a strong case for the nexus of emotions and performance but, more importantly, they provide a platform for potentially fruitful future research in this burgeoning area.

Emotion and Performance

Despite early interest, the study of emotions in organizations, and the relationship between emotion and work performance in particular, has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention (see Weiss and Brief, 2001, for a historical overview). Indeed, Weiss, Ashkanasy, and Beal (in press) go so far as to describe research progress in respect of performance effects as having a “particularly disappointing history”. By contrast, job satisfaction has been a traditional focus of IO research for seventy years now. Job satisfaction, however, is not strictly an affective phenomenon (see Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Wright & Staw, 1999).

In terms of the broad role played by emotion and affect in organizations, however, there has been a veritable explosion of research interest. Seminal articles by Pekrun and Frese (1992), Ashforth and Humphrey (1995), and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) were amongst the catalysts of this surge. The level of interest in emotions in organizations accelerated following the turn of the century following the publication of edited books by Ashkanasy, Härtel, and Zerbe (2000), Ashkanasy, Zerbe, and Härtel (2002), Fineman (2000), Lord, Klimoski, and Kanfer (2002), and Payne and Cooper (2001); and special issues of journals (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000; Fox, 2002; Humphrey, 2002; Weiss, 2001, 2002). In 2002, Brief and Weiss published the first article on this topic in the *Annual Review of Psychology*. More recently, Barsade, Brief, and Spataro (2003) have gone so far as to announce that the “affective revolution” represents a paradigm shift in IO psychology, parallel to the cognitive revolution that occurred nearly a decade earlier (see Ilgen, Major, & Tower, 1994).

Against this background, it stands to reason that researchers would eventually begin to focus on the central issue of our discipline: “Does it make a difference?” In this respect,

performance is a key focus of Affective Events Theory (AET), as espoused by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). In AET, organizational members' affective reactions to environmental stimuli are posited to determine affect-driven behavior and attitudes that, in turn, drive judgment-driven behavior. Among these behaviors are factors that directly affect members' performance (see also Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002; Weiss et al., in press). In 2002, the time was ripe for this question to be put to researchers working in this field, and *Human Performance* was clearly an appropriate outlet. Editor James Farr was quick to agree to the idea, and the call for papers was posted on the Emonet website (<http://www.uq.edu.au/emonet/>) in June, 2002, and in *The Industrial Psychologist* (the quarterly news magazine of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology), and in the newsletters of the Academy of Management and other professional associations. The initial call for proposals attracted 39 submissions, of which 17 were invited to submit full manuscripts for review. In the end, 14 full submissions were received. These were each assessed by three reviewers in two rounds of submission, leading to the selection of the five papers included in this issue. The full list of reviewers is given in Table 1.

The Special Issue Papers

Once the set of submissions was determined, the process of selecting the papers for the Special Issue was based essentially on the reviewers' assessments. Except insofar as the submissions needed to focus on emotions and performance in organizational settings, no particular domain was identified as having more priority than any other. The five papers that eventually emerged from this process comprise two theoretical essays and three empirical reports, and span three levels of analysis: within-person, individual, and group. As such, the

papers emphasize the multi-level nature of emotions in organizational settings (see Ashkanasy, 2003a,b).

In the opening paper, Cynthia D. Fisher and Christopher S. Noble report a study based on real-time experience sampling that aimed to resolve the age-old conundrum of the relationship between positive affect and productivity in everyday work life. In their study, participants wore programmed watches for a period of two weeks and, when prompted by the watch alarms, reported their emotional states and productivity at random times during their working day. Using sophisticated multi-level modelling techniques, the authors were able to obtain consistent support for a within-person model of performance and job affect. They concluded that their results demonstrate that task skill, interest, and effort all contribute to positive emotional states, and that these effects are mediated by performance.

The second paper is a theoretical essay by Keith James, Marc Broderson, and Jacob Eisenberg, which deals with another perennial and contentious issue: the relationship between workplace affect and creativity (see Isen, 2003). Based on the premise that productivity in today's organizations is inextricably linked to creativity, the authors present 23 research propositions about the affect-based determinants, mediators, and moderators of creativity. Their central argument is that, while studies have been conducted on various sub-components of the model, little is known about the inter-relationships between the governing variables. James and his co-authors argue that, although their model is still untested and far from complete, it provides a foundation that researchers can use to advance our knowledge in this field.

The following two papers report studies at the individual and group levels of analysis. Both are laboratory reports of student participants in survival exercises, where individual and group performance was measured in terms of the number of correct choices of items needed for

survival in a hypothetical emergency scenario. The two studies also included measures of individual differences in terms of emotional intelligence or competencies. Most significantly, both studies independently report similar results; that emotional intelligence/competencies play an important role in group decision-making. The studies are nonetheless differentiated in that they focus on different mechanisms underlying group performance.

In the first of these two papers, Peter J. Jordan and Ashlea C. Troth measured emotional intelligence using a self-report measure based on the Mayer and Salovey (1997) definition of the construct, and examined participants' conflict resolution styles. Results showed that emotional intelligence was unrelated to individual performance, but that it did predict group performance and integrative conflict resolution style. Lynn R. Offerman, James R. Bailey, Nicholas L. Vasilopolous, Craig Seal, and Mary Sass report a similar study in the second paper. Instead of measuring emotional intelligence, however, they assessed a related construct, emotional competence. Their results were nonetheless strikingly similar to those obtained by Jordan and Troth – emotional competence did not predict individual performance, but was a strong predictor of group performance. The secondary focus of their study was on team attitudes and leader emergence, and here again, emotional competencies were found to be significant predictors.

The fifth paper in this issue, by Taco H. Reus and Yongmei Liu, continues the focus on the individual and group levels of analysis, but postulates a more fully elaborated model of work group performance, which focuses on the processes leading to development of member and group knowledge underlying performance. In this respect, this paper complements the preceding empirical reports, and confirms the emerging view that emotional intelligence/competence is especially salient in group situations.

Implications of the Papers in the Special Issue

The five papers included in this Special Issue constitute the vanguard of research into the emotion-performance nexus in organizations. As such they deal with only a fraction of the potential scope of the field. Indeed, in view of the research emerging in neurobiology, it is clear that emotion is much more intimately involved in everyday thought processes than anyone had imagined previously (e.g., see Damasio, 1994, 1999, 2003). In this instance, it follows that the role of emotion and its connection to performance remains an exciting and potentially fruitful area for research in organizational behavior and IO psychology.

The opening paper in the Special Issue is an excellent example of what can be achieved when researchers probe more deeply into workplace behavior using sophisticated modern methods; in this instance, experience sampling method (ESM, see Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1983). In this instance, Fisher's paper goes a long way to resolving the traditional conundrum faced by researchers of job satisfaction, and that has consumed such an inordinate amount of research effort in studies based on between-person methods (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). More recently, Weiss et al. (in press) and Ashkanasy, Ashton-James, and Jordan (2003) have proposed more sophisticated models of emotion and performance based on processes of self-regulation (see Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), and have also reported some encouraging early results (Ashkanasy, Jordan, & Ashton-James, 2003; Weiss, Groves, & Beal, 2003). Taken in concert with Fisher and Noble's results reported in this issue, the implication is that this field of research is wide-open with possibilities, with exciting potential for researchers to improve our understanding of within-personal emotional responses, and their relationships with work performance.

The second paper in this issue sets out a comprehensive model of the emotional antecedents of creative performance, and has similar potential for exciting future research. Researchers (e.g., Estrada, Isen, and Young, 1997), have already demonstrated that creative performance is enhanced through positive affect. James and his colleagues, however, argue that the antecedents of creative performance are potentially determined by a much wider range of factors, including the type of affect, neural processes, environment, and personal disposition. Similar to the first paper, the possibilities for research arising from the model proposed by James and his colleagues represents further exciting opportunities for research.

The three papers that round out this edition bridge between individual and group levels of analysis. The two studies reported by Jordan and Troth (Paper 3) and Offermann and her colleagues (Paper 4) are remarkably similar in many ways, but are also differentiated in important respects. Both papers find that self-reported emotional intelligence/competence is related to improvements in team performance, but are unrelated to individual performance. This is an crucial finding, in that it directs scholars to a better understanding of the role of such competencies as catalysts of performance. Indeed, as organizations are inherently social institutions, the results carry implications for organizational performance. As noted earlier, although the two papers report similar results in terms of the target outcome variable in a decision-making task, each focuses on different aspects of the group processes involved. In the Jordan and Troth study, emotional intelligence was associated with more efficacious conflict resolution processes; in the Offermann et al. study, on the other hand, emotional competency was found to be related to team attitudes and leadership.

A potential limitation of these two studies is that they rely on self reports of emotional intelligence/competency. Indeed, the topic of emotional intelligence is attracting considerable

controversy, both in management (see Becker, 2003; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2003) and in IO psychology (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2003). On top of this issue, questions arise as to the validity of self-reports of intelligence or competency (see Daus & Ashkanasy for discussion of this point). Nonetheless, and taken in the context of earlier studies that have reported that group processes are predicted by self-reports of emotional intelligence (e.g., Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Hooper, 2002), these results do lend support to the validity of such measures, although there clearly remains scope for research based on abilities-based measures of emotional intelligence such as the MSCEIT (see Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003).

The final paper in this Special Issue begins to take the next step in research into the role of emotions as a facilitator of group performance. Like the previous two papers, the model includes a component of (what the authors of this paper refer to as) emotional capability, but it includes an elaboration of intermediary processes including group interaction and emotional contagion. The dependent variable in the model is also different, although related – group and individual members' knowledge. Of course, the authors of this paper did not have access to the other papers in this Special Issue, but it is noteworthy that their predictions still seem to parallel those in the other papers. Indeed, looking at these three papers as a package, one can not help but be impressed by the level of synergy of these researchers – all working independently. More importantly, from the point of view of research into the role of emotion and emotional capability in groups this consensus suggests that researchers wanting to work in this area can have confidence that they are on the right track, and that future research to unravel the mechanisms underling the effect of emotion and emotional intelligence/competency on group performance outcomes is likely to pay off.

In summary, the five papers in this Special issue represent an encouraging beginning to research into the nexus of emotion and performance in organizations. From the empirical papers, we have evidence that a strong performance-affect relationship can be demonstrated at the within-person level of analysis, and that that group performance can be predicted by group members' emotional intelligence/competencies, even when self-reported. The two theory papers provide intriguing insights into the future of research in this field in the area of creative performance and the performance of knowledge-intensive work groups. Researchers working in the field of emotions in organizations can take heart from the papers in this Special Issue that they are on the right track, and that their future research efforts are likely to be rewarded amply.

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Table 1. List of Special Issue Reviewers

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