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Does Leader Affective Presence Influence Communication of Creative Ideas within Work

Teams?

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Abstract

Affective presence is a novel emotion-related personality trait, supported in experimental studies, concerning the extent to which a person makes his or her interaction partners feel the same way (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010). Applying this concept to an applied teamwork context, we proposed that team leader affective presence would influence team members' communication of creative ideas. Multilevel modeling analysis of data from a survey study conducted with teams from a consultancy firm confirmed that team leader affective presence interacted with team member creative idea generation to predict inhibition of voicing their ideas. Specifically, withholding of ideas was less likely when team members generated creative ideas and their team leader had higher positive affective presence or lower negative affective presence. These findings contribute to emotion research by showing affective presence as a trait with interpersonal meaning, which can shape how cognition is translated into social behavior in applied performance contexts, such as teamwork in organizations.

Keywords: affective presence, silence behavior, creativity, teamwork, leadership

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Work Teams?

Most of us know a person who we would describe as 'exciting' or 'boring'. These attributed personality characteristics are based on how the person in question typically makes us feel when we interact together, and recent research has suggested that there is sufficient consistency in the feelings that people elicit in others to conceptualize it as a personality trait. This tendency to invoke either positive or negative feelings in others in a consistent and stable manner – i.e., across persons and time – has been termed *affective presence*. In their original work on affective presence, Eisenkraft and Elfenbein (2010) demonstrated it to be both conceptually and empirically distinct from related processes, such as trait affect and emotional contagion. Trait affect denotes the intrapersonal tendency of experiencing pleasant or unpleasant feelings (Watson, 2000), and emotional contagion refers to the propagation of a person's own feelings to others (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994); in contrast, affective presence is the interpersonal tendency of making others experience particular feelings, regardless of a person's own affect.

Eisenkraft and Elfenbein (2010) and Berrios, Totterdell and Niven (2015) found that affective presence has consequences for the person from whom it emanates, for example in terms of popularity and likelihood of receiving dates. However, little is known about the consequences of affective presence for interaction partners. In the present study we examined the interpersonal effects of affective presence on interaction partners by focusing on how the affective presence of team leaders influences the creativity process of their team members. Just as individuals' affect motivates their own behavioral tendencies (Forgas, 1995), we anticipate that affective presence will modify the behavior of interaction partners (Elfenbein, 2014). This effect is likely be amplified in circumstances where the one-to-many nature of

affective presence serves to modify the affective social environment of the individual (cf. Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), such as when team leaders influence their work team.

Creativity is of major relevance for workplace teams because it helps address complex problems encountered during daily work activities (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Creativity is commonly conceptualized as a two-stage process. The first, intrapersonal stage involves the generation of novel ideas, while the second, interpersonal stage involves communication of those ideas (Axtell et al., 2000). Communication of novel ideas is important as new ideas can promote better decision-making and resolve existing problems (Madrid, Patterson, & Leiva, 2015). Yet although creative ideas are usually communicated with other team members (Janssen, 2000), sometimes the interpersonal stage of creativity fails – and therefore hampers teamwork effectiveness – because employees choose to silence rather than share their novel ideas (Morrison, 2014).

As an interpersonal construct measured by its effect on others, the affective presence of team leaders could therefore have important consequences for this interpersonal stage of creativity, and help explain why employees do or do not silence their ideas. Here, we propose that leader affective presence will interact with idea generation in predicting silence behavior, such that once individuals generate novel ideas they would be inclined to silence those ideas depending on the extent to which their leader has positive or negative affective presence. Our arguments are based on the idea that the affect leaders elicit in team members will influence strategies for verbal communication (Forgas, 1999), through shaping team members' tendencies towards approach/avoidance behavior (Elliot, 2008), and by producing a work environment that is more or less conducive to voicing ideas (Lawler, 2001).

Specifically, we expect that team members who generate novel ideas will be encouraged to communicate them within teams when their leader has positive affective presence, because the latter will energize team members' approach tendencies (Elliot, 2008),

such as willingness to challenge the status quo and take risks through suggesting new ideas. Elicitation of positive feelings across team members will also promote rewarding social interchanges among them (Lawler, 2001), further encouraging their sharing of creative thoughts. As such, silencing of creative ideas is less likely to occur when leader positive affective presence is high. We therefore predict that leader positive affective presence will exacerbate the typically negative relationship between team member creative idea generation and silence behavior (cf. Janssen, 2000), such that this relationship will be stronger (i.e., with ideas less likely to be silenced) when leader positive affective presence is larger in magnitude (Hypothesis 1).

In contrast, leaders with negative affective presence are likely to activate avoidance tendencies in team members (Elliot, 2008), such as hesitation and withdrawal actions. Negative affective presence will also inhibit social interchange within the team, because the negative feelings elicited in the team will reduce affective rewards from exchanges (Lawler, 2001), and thus discourage communication of ideas. Thus, we predict that the negative relationship between idea generation and silence will be weaker (i.e., with ideas more likely to be silenced) when leader negative affective presence is larger in magnitude (Hypothesis 2).

Method

We conducted a survey study to test these hypotheses. Employees of a consultancy firm in Chile, for whom creativity was a central process, were invited to take part in the study on a voluntary basis. Eighty-six individuals nested in twenty-six teams (91% employee response rate, 100% team response rate) participated. The organization asked the research team not to collect information on demographics to guarantee participant confidentiality. However, given the high response rate to the survey across the organization, demographic information from the whole organization provided a proxy for the study's sample characteristics. In the organization, 77.5% of the employees were male and the average age

was 37.52 years (*SD* = 8.77). The average tenure of the organization's employees was 4.71

years (*SD* = 3.57), and organizational roles were 17.2% administrative, 56.3% professional

with no supervisor role, 14.9% supervisor and 11.5% manager. Team size ranged from 3 to 5

members.

Procedure, Measures and Analytical Strategy

Participants provided ratings of how their team leader made them feel (which was

used to calculate team leader affective presence), their creative idea generation, and their

silence behavior. Leader affective presence was measured with the scales developed by

Eisenkraft and Elfenbein (2010), framed as *"indicate to what extent does interacting with the*

leader of your team usually make you feel..."(1: *not at all* – 5: *a great extent*): *"happy"*

"enthusiastic" "bored" [reverse-scored] *"sad"* [reverse-scored] (positive affective

presence), and *"angry", "stressed", "relaxed"* [reverse-scored], *"calm"* [reverse-scored]

(negative affective presence). Creative idea generation was measured with three items

adapted from Janssen's (2000) idea generation scale, framed as *"during the last month, to*

what extent have you…?" (1: *never* – 5: *many times*): *"generated original solutions for*

problems of your team" (example item). Silence behavior was measured by adapting four

items from Detert and Edmondson's (2011) silence scale, framed as *"during the last month,*

to what extent have you…?" (1: *never* – 5: *many times*):*"kept ideas for developing new*

products, procedures or services to yourself" (example item).

In a separate survey, team leaders provided ratings of their own positive and negative

affect, using the scales of Warr, Bindl, Parker, and Inceoglu (2014), framed as *"During the*

last month working in your team, how often have you felt" (1: *not at all* – 5: *a great*

deal):*"enthusiastic", "joyful", "dejected"* [reverse scored], *"depressed"* [reverse-scored]

(positive affect); and *"anxious", "tense", "relaxed"* [reverse-scored], *"calm"* [reverse-

scored] (negative affect). These were used as control variables to determine whether leaders'

affective presence exerted effects on silencing of creative ideas over and above their own affect.

We examined the robustness of the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis. Inter-rater reliability and agreement indices (LeBreton & Senter, 2008) were utilized to determine whether affective presence represented a team-level construct and justify the operationalization of affective presence based on the average rating of how the leader made his or her team members feel. Hypotheses were tested using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (Raudenbush, Byrk, & Congdon, 2004), where creative idea generation and silence behavior were operationalized as within-team variables, whereas leader affective presence and leader affect were operationalized as between-team variables. Leader affective presence and leader affect were grand-mean centered, whereas creative idea generation was group-mean centered to interpret each effect at its respective level of analysis (Hox, 2010). Hypotheses for leader positive affective presence and leader negative affective presence were tested in separate models to avoid statistical power issues, due to the limited number of observations at the team level of analysis $N = 26$.

Results

Results for confirmatory factor analysis with all the measures showed limited goodness-of-fit $\chi^2 = 168.83$, df (84), $p = .00$; RMSEA = .11, SRMR = .10, CFI = .87, TLI = .84. Modification indices indicated high correlations for residuals between enthusiastic and happy for positive affective presence, and between relaxed and calm (reversed-scored) for negative affective presence. Hence, we allowed these items to freely covary, observing an acceptable and improved goodness-of-fit $\chi^2 = 132.51$, df (82), $p = .00$, RMSEA = .02, SRMR = .08, CFI = .92, TLI = .90 relative to the previous model $\Delta \chi^2 (df) = 36.32(2)$, $p < .01$, which supported the measurement model. Inter-rater reliability and agreement analyses showed values for leader positive affective presence ICC1 = .44, AD = .44 (Average Deviation,

Burke & Dunlap, 2002) and leader negative affective presence ICC1 = 24, AD = .54 that indicated leaders elicited positive or negative feelings in a consistent way among team members, and supported the operationalization of leader affective presence as a team-level construct.

The descriptive statistics of the variables are summarized in Table 1. As can be seen, leader affective presence was significantly related to silence behavior (positive affective presence $r = -.40$, $p < .01$; negative affective presence $r = .22$, $p < .05$), but not to idea generation (positive affective presence $r = -.07$, $p > .05$; negative affective presence $r = .08$, $p > .05$). Subsequent multilevel regression analysis (Models 1 and 3 in Table 2) showed significant main effects of both leader positive affective presence $b = -.39$, $SE = .15$, $p < .05$ and negative affective presence $b = .42$, $SE = .12$, $p < .01$ on silence behavior, over and above the impact of leader affect. In both of these models, statistically significant residual variance for the slope between creative idea generation and silence for the models concerning positive affective presence $\sigma^2 = .19$, $p < .05$ and negative affective presence $\sigma^2 = .20$, $p < .05$ supported the likelihood of finding cross-level interactions.

Testing the hypothesized moderation effect for positive affective presence (Model 2 in Table 2) showed that it interacted with creative idea generation $b = -.46$, $SE = .21$, $p < .05$ to predict silence. As illustrated in the left panel of Figure 1, creative idea generation was negatively and strongly related to silence when positive affective presence was high $b = -.60$, $SE = .19$, $p < .05$, but not when positive affective presence was low $b = .18$, $SE = .23$, $p > .05$. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. The results for negative affective presence (Model 4 in Table 2) showed that it interacted with creative idea generation $b = .60$, $SE = .17$, $p < .01$, such that creative idea generation was negatively and strongly related to silence when negative affective presence was low $b = -.81$, $SE = .19$, $p < .01$, but not when negative

affective presence was high $b = .16$, $SE = .92$, $p > .05$ (see right panel of Figure 1). Thus, hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that leader affective presence is a relevant trait for understanding creative silence in teams. Higher levels of leader positive affective presence were associated with less likelihood of team members withholding creative ideas, over and above the influence of leaders' own affect. An equivalent effect was also observed for lower levels of negative leader affective presence. These results do not necessarily suggest that positive and negative affective presence are the opposite ends of the same continuum (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010). Rather, different psychological processes may explain the consequences of positive and negative affective presence for communicating creative ideas. Positive feelings embedded in positive affective presence will likely invoke approach behavioral tendencies associated with interpersonal rewards (Elliot, 2008; Lawler, 2001), while a lack of negative feelings will make avoidance behaviors less likely, so team members will be less concerned with minimizing risks and thus more prone to sharing their ideas. Together these results highlight that leader affective presence has the potential to influence the interpersonal stage of the creative process, which supports the idea that affective presence is a trait with interpersonal meaning.

The study makes three research contributions. First, it makes a theoretical contribution to emotion research by broadening the conceptualization of affective-laden personality traits to include an interpersonal trait (*affective presence*) that can shape how cognition (*idea generation*) in other people is translated into social behavior (*idea communication*) in interpersonal settings. In contrast, previous emotion research has mainly concentrated on traits with intrapersonal meaning, such as positive/negative activation or extraversion/neuroticism (Watson & Clark, 1992). Second, the study adds to knowledge of affective

presence by providing, as far as we know, the first evidence of the effects of affective presence on interaction partners' communication behavior. Third, the research contributes to an understanding of creativity by highlighting an alternative pathway through which leaders can facilitate or stifle the development of novel ideas (Axtell et al., 2000; Mumford et al., 2002). In terms of methods, we complement emergent experimental findings on affective presence by replicating evidence for affective presence using a field research design conducted with employees nested in teams.

Regarding limitations, the use of a cross-sectional design and self-reported measures threaten the causal relationship proposed for leader affective presence on team member silence. However, the use of self-reported silence (dependent variable) is appropriate in field studies, because whether ideas have been withheld is best known by the self (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Furthermore, the statistical estimation of interaction effects when using cross-sectional designs is not typically affected by common method variance issues (Spector, 2006) in multilevel models (Lai, Li, & Leung, 2013), while reverse causality among the constructs examined is unlikely (i.e., silence or creativity is unlikely to predict affective presence because the latter is a multi-source measure). Another limitation, from a trait activation approach (Tett & Guterman, 2000), is that we were not able to account for possible contextual factors that might facilitate or inhibit leader affective presence. For instance, a supportive context for creativity might increase the effect of positive affective presence, whereas a context lacking in psychological safety might enhance the consequences of negative affective presence (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, further longitudinal and experimental research using multiple sources of information will be valuable to corroborate and expand the results observed here.

In summary, this paper provides evidence supporting the construct validity of affective presence applied to teamwork in an organizational setting, supporting also that

leader affective presence influences the interpersonal behavior of interaction partners. We trust that future research will be able to use these findings to further enrich our understanding of affective presence.

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Table 1:

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Reliabilities

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Silence	1.96	0.80	**(.87)**					
2. Creative Idea Generation	3.68	0.75	-.17	**(.82)**				
3. Leader Positive Affect	3.75	0.61	-.12	.10	**(.67)**			
4. Leader Negative Affect	2.65	0.80	-.06	.04	-.27**	**(.77)**		
5. Leader Positive Affective Presence	4.11	0.65	-.40**	-.07	.32**	.01	**(.82)**	
6. Leader Negative Affective Presence	2.38	0.73	.22*	.08	-.17	-.04	-.61**	**(.77)**

N = 91. Reliabilities are bold and displayed in parentheses on the diagonal. * *p*< .05. ** *p*< .01

Table 2:

Multilevel for Team Member Silence, Creativity and Leader Affective Presence

Estimate	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	1.95 (.09)**	1.95 (.09)**	1.95 (.09)**	1.95 (.09)**
Level 1 Variables				
Creative Idea Generation	-.24 (.15)	-.19 (.13)	-.27 (.14)†	-.33 (.12)*
Residual Variance Level 1	.38	.38	.38	.34
Level 2 Variables				
Leader Positive Affect	.16 (.24)	.14 (.24)		
Leader Negative Affect			-.15 (.13)	-.17 (.14)
Leader Positive Affective Presence	-.39 (.15)*	-.32 (.15)*		
Leader Negative Affective Presence			.42 (.12)**	.29 (.13)*
Residual Variance Level 2	.12	.12	.12	.12
Interaction Terms				
Idea Generation X Positive Affect		.14 (.31)		
Idea Generation X Negative Affect				.18 (.18)
Idea Generation X Positive Affective Presence		-.46 (.21)*		
Idea Generation X Negative Affective Presence				.60 (.17)**
Res. Var. Slope Idea Generation and Silence	.19*	.08	.20*	.08
Simple Slope Idea Generation and Silence [-+1SD]		[.18 (.23), -.60 (.19)*]		[-.81 (.19)**, .16 (.92)]
Deviance	197.76 (8)	192.87 (10)	196.87 (8)	183.78 (10)

$N_{L1/L2}$= 91/26. Unstandardized estimates. Null model for silence: within-subjects variance = .50, between-subjects variance = .13, deviance = 210.08 (3). **p< .01, *p < .05, †p < .10
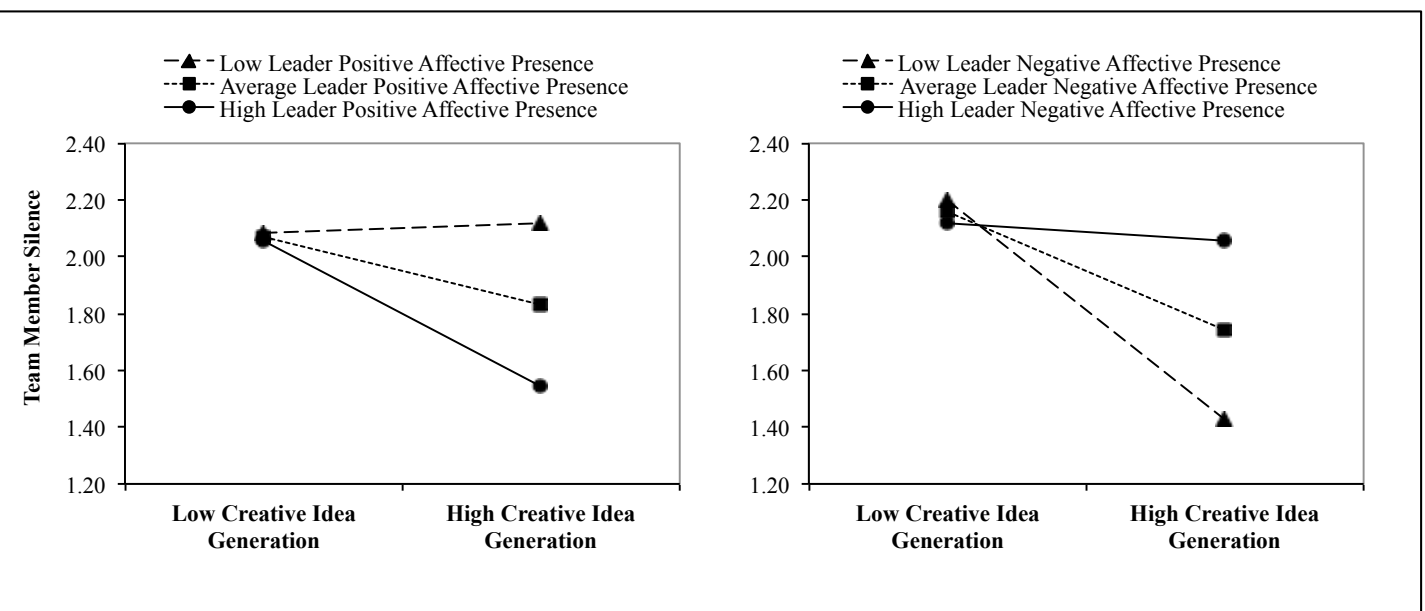
Figure 1. Interaction effect between leader affective presence and team member creative idea generation on team member silence